Chapter 1

AKPOHA: THE PEOPLE

As contexts may vary, '***Akpoha'*** can be the language, the geographical settlement, the ***people***, or the culture practiced in the place called Akpoha. For this study, focus is laid on the clan at the Afikpo Local Government Area which has common boundaries with Ibii, Amasiri, Abeomege, Igbo Ekwurekwu, and Ishinkwor. It is not the same as Akpoha-Igbo which is the name of a nuclear village somewhere in Igbo-Ekwurekwu. There is also a location in Akpoha called Akpoha-Igbo, the place where the Akpoha motor park and market are located. The coincidence of Akpoha-Igbo existing both in Igbo-ekwurekwu and in Akpoha is a testament to the migrational account that proceeds this section.

There is a collective tie binding the people called ***Nde Akpoha*** together, both home and abroad and that tie is the ***culture.*** It would however be difficult to discuss a people who are not known, and the only way to know a people is to identify the collective identity/(-ies) shared among all humans inhabiting therein. But can we extensively discuss Akpoha culture without a flashlight on their place of settlement and how they came to exist therein? We can't.

MIGRATIONAL HISTORY

Many centuries ago, there was a man called **Aja Iberekwu** who left Ogoja with his family: Omaka, Itiri, Igurube Nnekwu, Ubaghala, among others and travelled to the present day Afikpo. Aja Iberekwu was a warrior, but peaceful. His type of war was defensive, not offensive. He was not in the

act of engaging in wars with people to either take their lands or their artifacts (deities) as was the case in his time. Historians have accounted that the man Aja Iberekwu always advised his children against war while telling them the power of unity. According to Linus Egwu Ele and Etee Eze (2007; p2,3):

> *"In the course of their migration from Ogoja, their first area of settlement was in Ukwu near Idiba and an area in Umuka in Ekwurekwu Nta of Cross River State. They could not live long there because of insecurity and the people's cruelty. When they left the area, their next area of contact was Ugep but their stay there was also short-lived. Also in Ugep, three of the sons of Aja Iberekwu, Aja omaka, Ubaghala, and Itiri left to the bank of Ndibe River whereby each of them took his own direction a little further. These three sons are believed to be the founders of Ehugbo, Unwana, and Amasiri, respectively."*

It was understood that as the other three brothers left through the Ndibe River (Ndibe Beach) and settled in different areas, so did Igburube Nnekwu migrate through the present Egbara River which marks a common boundary between Akpoha and Igbo Ekwurekwu, and settled. Igurube Nnekwu was believed to be a hunter, a fisherman, and a farmer. He had a son called Okpoto-Okum who he directed to advance towards the area Ubaghala (father of Ekuma Ubaghala) was residing and enlarge his coast. Ekuma Ubaghala and his cousin were in good terms, even though they marked their boundaries quite on time using a stream called *Ngele Nwa Ekpesu* and planted *Mkpokorodu* trees. For

decades of their existence, it was always on their lips to warn their offspring against spilling each other's blood, citing the grave implications.

This research learned that the first place of settlement for Okpoto-okum was Nkalaezi, which is the area the descendant of Ubaghala and Igurube Nnekwu came to interface, and are currently conflicting over boundary. As his family kept enlarging, so was the need for batter trading to satisfy human wants; from the sales of dried Okra (Ukpor Okwuru) to the sales of yams and other farm produces, fishes, meats, etc. They saw the obviousness of having a center where this trading activities would be taking place, then devoted the ***Ahia Ukpokwuru*** to it, which gave the place the monumental name even after they left the area. Potters from Ishiagu were also coming to this market to sell their wares and some of our people learned the clay pot making skills from them. Our ancestors often referred to them as "Ishiagu Okpu ite" which means "Ishiagu the clay potters".

When it was learned that the neighbors by the bank of the river were encroaching across the river to farm in the territory of Okpoto-okum, the people of Amata Okpoto-okum had to shift their concentrations from Nkalaezi to Omaeze where they settled and fought till they were able to resist the Ishinkwor people and restrict them to the riverbank, marking the saying that *Enyium bu Oke*. Other circumstances still arose which made the people to head to Okpaezi from where they moved into the current settlement. The Okpotokum community really experienced series of confrontations and survivals through war, which gave them the name ***"Ebiri Ogu"*** meaning inhabitation known for war. Thanks to *echeri bekee* which helped us align with the language of peace and dialogue.

Though contrary to the above, connections or relationships with

neighboring communities, Prof. Egwu U. Egwu in his book "The People of Unwara (Nde bu Unwara)" clearly withdraws Unwara from the same historical background as Akpoha, Ehugbo, and the rest of the present day Afikpo Local Government Area, noting that Unwara people migrated into their present settlement from somewhere Nguzu Edda, not that they originated from Nguzu, but that they had been migrating from various settlements including Okigwe, till they got to Nguzu Edda where they further migrated (as a result of aggression by other people that came around) to where they currently occupy. Let me quote Egwu, 2016, thus:

> *"...Our ancestors had to maneuver their ways through uncharted but occupied territories, towards what is known as Okigwe today. The maneuver sometimes involved battles with the original occupants of the land, mostly Bantus, the Ohodu people, the Dem-Dem people who were mostly cannibals according to the narratives of Flora Shaw, (Lady Lugard). Never the less, our ancestors gained victory over them all, settled at Okigwe..."* (Egwu, 2016)

Tracing further, he notes that from Okigwe to Nguzu Edda, they migrated further to the present day Unwara with some of them migrating to other places:

> *"The majority moved from Nguzu to find another place of abode and like Isaac of the Holy Bible, in this new place, Unwara grew great and went ahead to be even greater."*

(Egwu, 2016)

Because we must avoid every deliberate or avoidable digression, my hands are tied at this point from rewriting a people's history for them, especially as this study is focused basically on the historical origin of Akpoha alone. The historical origin of the Akpoha people except when written by an indigent Akpohan can be twisted, too.

THE RIFT WITH AMASIRI

There is every need for elders to consider the kind of narratives handed down to younger generations, especially at a time where ownership of land is sensitively prioritized, life depends largely on mineral resources a piece of land harbors, and what comes from elders remain largely a dependable fact. What is transpiring between Amata-Akpoha and Ezeke-Amasiri is a result of either deliberately surged 'historical account', purported land-grabbing agenda narrative, or loss of elders who can give unbiased, objective accounts of both sister communities. Whichever way, what is happening is not happening by accident. They are a result of some people's efforts to replace the long-standing love and unity by intense conflicts.

In the beginning, after the eras of Igurube Nnekwu and Ubaghala, there came the time of Okpotokum and Ekuma Ubaghala. It was the same era of Aja Omaka, son of Omaka Ejiali of the great Ehugbo clan. They had a great sense of brotherhood and enjoyed unity among themselves. These brothers had such unity that could make one help another in a fight without knowing the cause of the fight only to ask what the cause of it was after the fight is over. It was a courtesy of their father Aja Iberekwu.

It was learned that it was this sense of oneness that gave the name

'Umu era aani' (children fed from the same breast) to the Unwara clan which continued corrupting till it became pronounced as Unwara. Accounts by Prof Egwu U. Ugwu (Nigerian Peoples and Culture, Ebonyi State University) says that **Unwana** is merely a corruption of the already corrupted name, Unwara, by British missionaries who saw light (Unwana in Ibibio or Efik), heard it pronounced as Unwana and then thought it was of the same pronunciation and meaning. Lest we digress…

While alive, Aja Iberekwu often emphasized the need for them to remain one as a bunch of broom can never be broken, unlike a stick of broom. He walked round the territories he had acquired for them and marked land boundaries and warned each of them against trespassing the boundaries. As a wise man, he foresaw the time when these boundaries would become a substance for blood spillage among these brothers.

History tells us how Okpotokum and his cousin, Ekuma Ubaghala stood at their boundary, ***Ngele nwa ekpesu*** to take an oath never to trespass boundaries and never to spill each other's blood. Apart from the stream of Ngele-nwa-ekpesu, planted Mkpokorodu trees were also used to mark these boundaries.

Let's highlight the symbolism of Mkpokorodu and why they used it to mark boundaries. From those ancient times, Mkpokorodu was a symbol of peace. Where two are fighting, the third party was not expected to join the fight but to show them a leaf of Mkpokorodu. This would remind them that they are one and they would stop the fight. The Mkpokorodu remains relevant in conflict resolution even till this day. While ***Ire Nkwu*** is the only symbol of injunction across many parts of Igbo land, Mkpokorodu and irenkwu play same role across Afikpo. We all understand that the presence of irenwku in

conflict-ridden areas, especially across Afikpo and Edda is symbolic of temporarily halting the conflict so as to resort to a more peaceful solution.

Fast-forward to the times post Okpotokum and Ekuma Ubaghala, Amasiri women started coming across the boundary, not to take it by force, but to seek for lands in exchange for which they paid some monetary and otherwise values.

As time flies, men of Amasiri origin also began to encroach to the bank of Ngele-nwa-ekpesu, but this time around, no more to ask, but to take it by force. The forceful use of the land began to erode conflicts among both sister communities. In some of such instances, there would be a physical show of force among men from Amata-Akpoha and men from Ezeke-Amasiri over the piece of farm land. Hopes were still high that it would end in elders addressing the conflict diplomatically until the water began to run to the brim.

At some points, young men from Amasiri would invade the farms at Ohia-erem, collect cutlasses and other farming tools from aged women, then let them go. Diplomacy would still be followed to retrieve the confiscated items from them through their elders and elders of Amata-Akpoha.

The first signs came, surprisingly to us that they were not only coming to stop farmers, but were also coming to harvest our palm fruits in our forests, fish in our ponds, and even harvest our cassavas like conventional thieves. At this point, there was a confusion on what exactly was the bone of contention – our farm produces or a boundary?

In another jaw-breaking sign, they invaded the farm tent of Late Omezue Daniel Agha Amah, father of Dr. Chris Oyo Agha (Alhaji) and vandalized (or made away with) all his farm produces including yam tubers,

fishes, bags of rice, etc. Thanks heaven they did not get him. Big gratitude to his children and youths of Amata Okpotokum for the wisdom that restrained them from reprisals. This time, the state government was informed and they came and took pictures. No visible action was taken, and we bare it again as an injury inflicted by brothers.

When we could not return violence for violence, they started coming over to steal our rice in the farms. They would come in group that could overpower the few people in the farms at the moment, scare farmers away and harvest their rice. An objective judgment can attest to a simple fact that theft is not in any way justifiable as a means to clarify land boundaries. We continued writing to the government.

Let me note here that in all of these saga, there have been repeated inconsistencies vis-à-vis the exact location they claim is the boundary and their inability to precisely and specifically point to a notable landmark of the boundary places them at the disadvantageous ends of many court cases. In many occasions, we had won them in courts as our resolves have always been to seek redress through the court of law. Having educated them in court and before state actors about the stream Ngele-nwa-ekpesu, including the symbolism of the Mkpokorodu standing at the boundaries, their next action was to cut down the Mkpokorodu trees to erase the said proofs. That alone rendered their fights purposeless.

In 2019, they invaded as usual in an Ahor market day. This time they concentrated on the Ookpu-achi axis, broke down a culvert constructed for easy plying of the road, exhumed yams seedlings from the soil, cut few of the yams and took away others. This was after they had sold out a part of the land to a rock mining company and fed on the cassava farms of Amata-Akpoha

women around that axis.

In 2020, a bleeding tragedy occurred. They murdered in cold blood one Mr. Sunday of Ezi Ude, Amagu village, popularly known as 'Mr. Cash'. That day, they struck in, shooting into the air to scare farmers away. People that saw him before the tragic news of his disappearance was broken said they last saw him around Ahia Ukpokwuru. Women heard his voice reverberating in a call for help as they kept dragging him over to their own side. Oh helpless women! How they wished they could help. How these women wished the aggressors were without firearms – they wouldn't mind fighting it out. There was a burial of a prominent figure in Amata, reason allot of people, especially men did not go to farms that day. The stream of tears kept rolling down the cheeks of those helpless women as his voice kept going faintly, the sky angrily turning bloody, goose pimples growing into boils, as anger grew the belly like a tumor. It was evident that the highest sacrifice was about to be paid, not to the gods of the land, but as an unjust fine, a price paid for being merciful due to the blood that binds brothers. How Cash, a hero, died a victim of collective benevolence! No deity demanded a human sacrifice and he volunteered. No plan, no prophecy, and no suspicion that there was war on the way. An innocent father was murdered in his ancestral land in peace time, not for stealing, not for defying any man's wife, not for attempting the least sacrilege known to the land, but for owning a fertile land. The privilege to raise his children was denied him by people who would go back home and meet their own children, eat to their satisfaction and lay with their wives to bear more children.

Oblivious to all that a life has been stolen, we were busy burying the dead, drinking, eating, and consoling the bereaved. We felt comfortable that we have no enemies to frighten us into thinking double, only to be awakened

to the ghastly news that another has deceased. Many women ran into the village on bare feet, their heels almost touching the back of their heads. They hoped to alert the men before the worst could happen, but the worst had already happened. The youths did not hesitate to go after them. But they had achieved their goal, so would not wait any longer. These fellows perfectly absconded with a soul they could never replace.

We alerted the government through the security agents, and what do you expect? Admittance? Never! Even the worst fool knows how to deny crimes. They denied and we consoled ourselves.

The gods of the land were never asleep. Few days later, some fishermen residing within our side of the river bank brought a news to us that they found a dead man bound with stones as he was floating on the water surface with heavy stones. We couldn't wait to doubt such 'anti-gravity' story, after all we are looking for someone. We went after hm. It was such a scary phenomenon. The decomposing remains of Cash showed evidently how he was badly mutilated before he died. He did not go to the river and was drowned. The security agents were again informed and they came and confirmed we were not lying. What would we do? He was taken to the morgue, from where he was brought back for burial.

On August 3rd, 2025, they again stole four lively heads from us. It was around 08:00 am or thereabouts, when farmers had settled in their farms and their working tools blazing on the swampy soil. That was a season for rice farming. Busy workers were attacked with guns while tilling their swamp with hoes, planting their rice with bamboo scopes, or clearing the weed with their blunt knives. Who prepares for war while going to his farm? Before the news could arouse a resistance, they had escaped.

We came back to count… counted and counted again, and all over again, but indeed, four pillars of their families were already out of their places.

Mr. Ugbor Okoh, a native of Ezi Ugo, Amachi; Mrs. Comfort Reuben Igwe, a native of Ezi Chukwu Aluu, Evo-Odome; Mr. Ootu Uche, a native of Ezi Odome, Evo-Odome, and Mr. Ebi Oyo, native of Ezi Enya Mgbor, all of Amata-Akpoha were reported missing.

Families wept and begged to be given the remains of their murdered family members to bury, but even that privilege to bury the dead was denied. What more? The government. They already said it in their mind that the highest we could do was to call on the government. And what later happened? Was anyone arrested and prosecuted for it? I am not sure. Even as I write this book, we cannot point to where these brothers and a sister are. Whether they are still alive but cannot come back to us or they are all dead is what we have not been able to ascertain.

This pain had not settled with us until the gory Monday, 26th January, 2026 when a young man, Mr. Augustine Ugbala Ite, native of Ezi Ugbala-Evoekpiri who went to the bush to get bamboo could not return home. His widowed mother waited, but in vain. He left five little children under the cares of their widowed young mothers. Little children were denied the privilege of father's corrections/ directions and advices while still struggling to learn ABC. This is never an end to a tragedy that befell a people. It only opened a vacuum of excruciating pains that would take no shorter than a century to heal.

NOTE: In all these attacks and aggressions, the elders of Amata-Akpoha have been the reason a full-blown war has not ensued. Warm-blooded young men have always expressed readiness to confront the

aggressors head-on, but which elder sits and declares war among his children if not a foolish elder? It may appear to our aggressive brothers like there are no men in Akpoha, but if we all chose to dance to this drum of madness, there may be no one left to live in both Amasiri and Akpoha at the end of the war. In this, I must not fail to acknowledge the diplomatic efforts of community stakeholders like Elder Paul Okoh (Okwuru oha), Prof John O. Igidi, HRH Ezeogo Michael Ekezie (Okpotokum III), Chief Philip Igwe Ele (Enyi), Barrister Enya M. Nwocha, Chief Michael Ulu Etee, Mr. Pius Etee, the Origbos, Ichies, members of the Ekpu Uke Eto Traditional Council, members of the Essa Traditional Council, the Amata-Akpoha Youth council under the chairmanships of Late Mr. Eke Oyo Ogbonnia, Late Mr. Eni Enya, Hon. Donatus Uche Olua, Mr. Elem Uwa, and other well-meaning sons of Amata who have always fought to keep peace on the track while sourcing for a solution to the protracted conflicts.

We are not cowards, we are 'Ebiri Ogu' (A people whose fights are always difficult to end) and 'Ama-Ogu' (A village known for war). Before these days, we already had war written boldly on our foreheads, but we are never ready to fight with our own blood brothers. Even our greetings were given birth to by the series of wars our forefathers survived from *ohaogu Ishinkwor* and others to keep us here. This legacy keeps the likes of Ugo Chite Ikenga, Enya Mgbo Eni, Ogbuu Eze, and other heroes forever inscribed on the indelible tablets of history.

Let me end this chapter by reminding our Amogu brothers that *mgbe akoru Chite bu mgbe o weri Alobo. Ihe meri imi meri enya.* We cannot withstand this dilemma while dividing ourselves. If we leave any loopholes, when the common self-made enemies shall come, the tragedy may take a different toe.

In conclusion: This section of this book tends to clarify that Akpoha, alongside other sister communities, Amasiri, Ibii, etc, never started existing as a people's place of inhabitation from the days of Adam, and we did not conquer or evict any people to take their land, neither were we accommodated by anyone. It was an empty space of land occupied by trees and wild lives until our ancestors introduced human lives to it. It also intends to educate the younger generations against the misleading narratives shared by our Amasiri neighbors that their ancestor was the one who gave our ancestor a place to settle. Mark such narrative as a very irrational fallacy from the pit of hell which should never be inculcated in a generation that prioritizes unity over division for a peaceful co-existence. This book would also not champion lies by claiming that Nde Akpoha accommodated Amasiri as our ancestors never raised us to lie for any reason. Elders who provided us with information to write this book upheld their sanctity with the cultures, traditions, and norms of Ali Akpoha. The commitment of our ancestors to be our brothers' keepers has been the reason we shall always stand by the truth and nothing but the truth.

Chapter 2

Trado-Politico Systems in Akpoha.

One cannot just mention one particular political system operational in Akpoha except by stating the various ways of administrating the political and social affairs of the community by the various arms of our traditional government.

"Igbo enweghi eze" is a popular aphorism held across Igboland due to the fact that monarchy (a system of government run by a king, an emir or a queen) was never the system in Igboland before the advent of colonialism by the fair-skinned colonists. The establishment of kingship in most Igbo communities was one of their strategies to run their indirect government because it was difficult to control those at the grass-root levels without monarchs as intermediaries. Some of those who were privileged to be made 'kings' by the white men would later transfer same powers to their children (mostly the first male child), making the system a hereditary one. Others preferred to leave it rotational. There were very few known kingdoms in Igboland before the coming of British colonialism, and those few never exceeded three kingdoms. Every other kind of kingdom came lately as a wing of indirect rule, a tool in the hands of the whites.

Recall that Late (HRH) Ezeogo Egwu Owuu was the first crowned monarch in Akpoha, but he was not as old as the Akpoha political system. Akpoha had existed over some centuries before the birth of Ezeogo Egwu Owuu, therefore he was born to meet a pre-existing traditional political structure. What then was the archaic political system?

The ***Origbos*** exercise the most supreme powers in Akpoha. Though not rated by age, an origbo is seen as the eldest man in every kindred as he represents the earliest man in that kindred (the ancestor). He is chosen by his kinsmen or through some signs that present him as most competent, or chosen by the gods of the land. From the moment an origbo is ordained, everyone, including those not from his kindred begins to accord him great respect. The origbos are the only ones traditionally entitled to greeting four times while others can greet only twice. By the powers he exercises in terms of age, he is seen as running a kind of gerontocracy.

But he does not end there. There is also the theocratic system operated by the origbos. He stands as both the kins-head and the priest. He is in fact, the eyes, ears, and of course the mouthpiece of the gods. In short, they are seen as the gods (reason they are referred to as *Ali l' eje ije*). Just as the bishop, he is the only one (or they are the only ones) worthy to offer certain crucial sacrifices to the gods. Apart from an Origbo, no one else is worthy to carry out an appeasement ritual when one commits a sacrilege, but upon the mandate of the Origbo, or where the origbo is not immediately present, the eldest man in the kindred can play this role. From ordination, he is sworn to an oath with the land. By implication, an origbo should naturally be sacred; he should have the ability to call a spade a spade even at the face of death. The yardstick is virtue; hence an origbo is seen as an upright man. However, when the reverse is the case the origbo practically has a very minimal chance of living long.

If there is "Holy of Holies" in any kindred, an origbo alongside the oldest men are the only ones worthy to visit it when the need be.

Even though the Origbos have the above powers to exercise, the system itself relinquishes certain powers and duties to certain peripheral bodies that constitute the Akpoha government.

There are of course certain arms of the Akpoha traditional political structures that exercise powers in their various capacities, thus:

LEGISLATION

The lawmaking process in Akpoha comes in two ways: Laws by elders/ community stakeholders and Laws by an arm of the community government. The former can be called 'executive orders'.

Executive Orders: Where the need be, certain laws are made indoors by the community stakeholders in agreement with the Ezeogo, Nde Origbo, Nde Ichie, Nde Esaa and Nde Eto but will be thereafter made public the resolutions. It is always laws on very crucial subjects that take this process. Let us note here that though the Ezeogo of Akpoha (either Igurube-Nnekwu or Okpoto-okum) is the sole traditional ruler of his autonomous community, the passing of executive orders are not without scrutiny or consolidation by the elders in council or community stakeholders. The enforcement sometimes are carried out by the Ekpu Uke Eto as an important governing arm and when the need be, the youths are involved.

Laws by an arm of the government: When we say 'arm of government' we mean the different groups or units of people who are empowered by the community to carry out certain tasks for the progress of the community. These units have certain powers they can exercise and certain laws they can make. Some of them don't have a different body or people who carry out enforcement on defaulting individuals but rather do so collectively, sometimes by application of force or other techniques. Such units of the community government include:

i). <u>Youths (Umu ogba igidi agu)</u>: They are a powerful arm of the Akpoha political system. Of course the youths of every community play a vital role in ensuring lawfulness and orderliness. Akpoha political system gives the youths the required supports to carry out their fundamental responsibilities such as security and the rest of them. For instance, it is the responsibility of the youths to address such insubordination issue as a child insulting an elder. Sometimes the child might need to be flogged some sensible strokes of cane by the youths, addressing criminal cases like theft, etc.

It is also the duty of the youths to ensure that the environments are entirely clean by clearing the bushes on the roadsides and even sweeping dirty areas and the concerned persons who should have done it would pay for their services thereafter. In clearing the bushes, it is also a collective labor which would be divided according to age grades. After the labor, each age grade would move to drive some money or equivalent values from their other age mates who failed to participate in the labor. Because it has this consequence of paying fines (no matter how little the token is), it is always taken very seriously each time there is an announcement for such a labor.

The youth category entails the age grades between the next age grade to celebrate their 50th birth anniversary (Ukipko) and the least recognized age grade by the community. Every other age grade is excluded from such labors. The Ukipko leads the rest of the age grades to the venue of the labor and supervises them while they do the works. They also have a way of dealing with their fellow Ukikpo who failed to come and do the supervisory work with them. Expectedly, the leadership of the youth mostly lies with the Ukikpo, except when the Ukikpo admit that they don't have a competent hand to handle the youth leadership, then the next age grade to them takes over. However, such has been a rare phenomenon. The elders still reserve the rights to send the youths on other errands or relinquish other tasks to them if they feel that the task is more suitable to be carried out by the youths.

The youths have the right to make a law, but depending on the magnitude of the law made and the gravity of its punishment. Some laws made by the youths are subject to the evaluation and approval of the elders-in-council and the Ezeogo.

ii) Ekpu Uke Eto*:* They are an age group comprising of three age grades.

Like the functionaries in our secondary school days, they are given the power to operate over most of the affairs of the community. Even at that, they don't have the supreme power over all matters as they can also be sued when an accused thinks he was wrongly judged by the Eto or a jungle justice was administered in his case. They meet every *Ahor* market day and deliberate over certain important issues affecting the community. They also possess the power to entertain judgments from people who have crises (misunderstandings) with each other and other various important affairs of the community. Notwithstanding, they can preside over both civil and criminal cases.

iii. Ekpu Uke Essaa: They are older than the Ekpu Uke Eto and are also three age grades grouped together. They exercise certain powers too, and can sit over certain cases. They also make some laws which are considered to be within their capacity and jurisdictions. When a case is too strong to be handled by the Eto group, the Essaa can sit over the case and when these two bodies have same or like rulings, the judgment becomes absolute, or the parties are allowed to go to the English man's court.

iv. Nde Ichie: One can say that Nde Ichie are the apex decision-making body in Akpoha and are highly respected. They are the age group of people between their mid-seventies and their mid-eighties. They possess various powers such that both the Eto and Essaa answer to them and their decisions are the final. Here is where the *Origbos* can be found. Nde Ichie can only consider the command of an Ezeogo as an opinion and not as a supreme command, no matter how tyrannical or strong the Ezeogo tends to be. If the government wishes to do anything in Akpoha and it is Nde Ichie that are saying 'No' to it, it simply means that such thing cannot be obtainable because deliberate insistence can result to a breakdown of law and such amounts to a deliberate

undermining of Nde Akpoha and their traditional systems.

Other older age groups are the **Horrii** and the **Rikweri.** The Horrii are atleast between their late nineties and their late hundreds (95-109 years) while the Rikweri group are between their 110s and above. It is only in rare cases that the Horrii and the Rikweri would have to be involved, and if they are, then they have the final say. It is on the ground of this absolute power of the Horri and Rikweri to rule that the system of the Akpoha political system can be termed **Gerontocracy.**

v. <u>The Origbos</u>

The system of governing or piloting the leadership affairs of Akpoha can be said to be the gerontocratic system where the eldest in the community stands also as the leader. When they first arrived Akpoha, there were families which begat what we know in the present days now as kindred, and they were Odeke Chi (the ancestor of Ezi Odeke), Ugo Chite (ancestor of Ezi Ugo and Ezi Agha Udu), Ije-Okwu Mba (ancestor of Nde Ijeokwu: Ezi Orji, Ezi Mba, Ezi Imo, Ezi Oka, Ezi Chukwu Aluu, Ezi Ugbala, Ezi Ije Aja, and Ezi Ekuma Ngidi), Enya Mgbo Eni (the ancestor of Ezi Enya Mgbo, Ezi Oyo Oku), Oru Ngwute, Ele Ukwu, etc.

These ancestors would come together and take major decisions, especially in land-related matters. They were the heads of families and the reason they would come together for decision making was to ensure that every single family's opinion or interest was well represented. It was later that these positions were replaced with the 'Origbo' title.

The Origbos play a very vital role in shaping the governance structure of Akpoha as they have the final decision-making powers especially on most

sensitive issues in Akpoha. It is significant here to point out that it is not every kindred in Akpoha that can crown an Origbo because of certain reasons. This book lacks the audacity and privilege to mention such kindred not entitled to an Origbo title, for the peace and unity of Akpoha.

An Origbo is highly respected across Afikpo and Edda Local Government Areas, and of course other places that value titled men, because he represents an entire kindred and is seen as a highly intelligent and most importantly, a sacred man. It is highly sacrilegious of an Origbo to engage in any act generally considered as abominable. He is forbidden from telling lies and must not receive bribe from anyone for any reason. If he soils his hands or is in any way found wanting, the gods of the land will strike him dead in their own ways. He represents the ancestors of his kindred and remains the only man who can call them and they will immediately answer. Where ever there is an Origbo, no other person is expected to pour libations or invoke the spirit of the dead ancestors (unless in a situation where the origbo relinquishes such to another person, mostly the eldest person).

vi. <u>The Ezeogo</u>

Without prejudice to the fact that every Ezeogo is the number one citizen of his community, it is unfortunate that this position has some pitfalls in Akpoha because the kingship system is new in Akpoha with Ezeogo Egwu Owuu as the first crowned King in Akpoha. It doesn't mean that the status of the Ezeogo is in any way belittled, but the supreme powers to rule, decree, order, or enforce are not in the hands of the Ezeogo.

Like the president in a confederal system of government, the Ezeogo's power has been de-concentrated and tasks and duties relinquished to the various governing units in Akpoha. But the Ezeogo is highly respected as it is

not all kinds of tasks that he is involved in, except the most sensitive ones. One of the advantages is that it strips the Ezeogo of the intoxicating power of tyranny, where such would have existed.

Although the position of an Ezeogo is rotational based on villages (Evo), it is always the most credible and faultless individuals that are crowned. Past indulgence/ involvement in any known anti-social act or whatever the tradition considers abominable is the biggest barrier to becoming the Ezeogo in Akpoha.

We wish to underline here that the Ezeogo's position in Akpoha came as an admitted modification to the Akpoha traditional political system, reason there is absence of power concentration. Noteworthy also is that there are certain kindreds that cannot produce an Ezeogo, even though the elders (*Nde Ichie)* would not want to rollover history for peace' sake.

Other smaller Units of Legislation

i. Age Grades

As afore highlighted, there are about five age categories which contribute directly and indirectly in major decision making matters in Akpoha. This system is in Amata just as it is in Amogu. The age categories are: the Youth, the Ekpu Uke Eto, Ekpu Uke Esaa, Nde Ichie, Nde Horrii, and the Rikweri. These are different from age grades.

Age grade system is almost a general practice across Igboland with such names as 'eburu', 'nde elia', 'nde uke', 'nde ogbo', 'nde ebiri', etc. Where practicable, age grades are a collection of people born within a given age range and recognized by the village or community stakeholders. They perform various functions like undertaking general labors, carrying out some crucial

projects, contributing where necessary to all kinds of social developments, etc. Within and among them are certain ***dos*** and ***don'ts*** which guide their collective behaviors.

This is one of the smallest units of legislation in Akpoha. Every age grade has some selected members of executives who manage the affairs of the age grade. Age grades have names they are called and some of the age grades in existence as at the time of writing this book include:

1. Eku rue ulo
2. Ndu ka eku
3. Uka atu
4. Nwa meri gini
5. Udoka
6. Ako bu ike
7. Igwe bu ike
8. Unu atu enyium
9. Achi na-agbari oha
10. Iro egbu
11. Esobe onu
12. Egwu atu
13. Ugwu mba

14. Onwu enwe enyi

15. Ndu bu isi

16. Ofor bu ike

17. Aka ji eku, (and many others)

ii. The Family

Family here refers to the matrilineal families known as *Ikwu.* Across Afikpo and Edda, matrilineal family system is the basic kind of family system in operation. Here, the children of a man's sister (s) are considered more as his own family than his children. The right to inherit what the man has remains exclusively reserved for the man's children except the ones he gives out to the maternal relatives while alive.

These family groups have some powers to make certain laws within their capacities and carry out enforcements on them. Any land a man inherited from his maternal lineage can only be transferred to his sisters' children and not his children, this would make the land ownership remain in that maternal family. Some of the Ikwus in Akpoha include (but not limited to) the following:

1. Ibe Anuma

2. Ibe Okwu (or Aluu Idam)

3. Ibe Urimma

4. Ibe Ugo Onya

5. Ibe Mgbirime

6. Ibe Mgbere nwa

7. Ibe Ewu Ali

8. Ibe Udu

9. Ibe Enyi Nka

10. Ibe Utara Orie

11. Ibe Ogbagha

12. Ibe Uma

13. Ibe Agari Ugwu

14. Ibe Awo Isa

15. Ibe Omaka

16. Ibe Odom Ali

17. Ibe Alacha

18. Ibe Efo Ugbala

19. Ibe Osim (which have been mixed up with Ibe Awo Isa and are now all Awo Isa)

20. Ibe Chi Ugo

21. Ibe Ehwaga Orie

22. Ibe Ezeke

23. Ibe Ugwu Eku

24. Ibe Okeogu or Ume eku, etc.

These families exist across Afikpo and Edda, and two people from the same Ikwu can never inter-marry, otherwise such act is seen as heavily sacrilegious. Even if they do not inter-marry but have any kind of sexual intercourse together, the family would demand they (both parties involved) appease the land for committing such sacrilege. It is more like one having a sexual affair with his blood sister. For this reason, any young man that thinks he is due for inter-sexual relationship or that he has found a lover would first go home and ask questions around to find out if the said lover is not from the same ikwu family as him. In the succinct terms, an Ibe Ogbagha man from Akpoha is highly prohibited by tradition from marrying an Ibe Ogbagha maiden as she is definitely seen as his flesh and blood.

This is a very sensitive matter in Akpoha. In such a case where a woman was married from a far land where the ikwu system does not operate, the woman with all her children born for the man automatically becomes the same ikwu as the husband. It doesn't go against the sacred laws of the land and no appeasement ritual is required.

iii. Kindred (Umunna/ Umu Di)

It is a patrilineal relationship connected by paternal genetics. People are related based on the common great-grand father, grand-father, or father they share. They usually occupy a particular compound (Ezi) and can exercise certain powers over themselves where necessary. They share allot in common and so, need some laws to govern their ethicality in dealing with each other. Some of the kindreds in Akpoha occupy more than one compound.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

How we settle disputes among one another matters allot in our peaceful co-existence as human beings, and eminently, crisis is one inevitable existence that lives among men. In short, as long as communication endures among men, so do crises. For this fact, Nde Akpoha have their own ways of putting such disputes to rest or instilling understanding among people having some misunderstandings. Below are the bodies that exercise judicial powers in Akpoha:

1. Nde Meri Ugwu: These are titled men in the Akpoha society. Though not a compulsion, it is essentially necessary for an Akpoha man above fifty years to take the ugwu title. A man up to the age of taking the ugwu title who has not done so is considered incompetent for various sensitive positions because there are allot of things he might not know about the land he was born until he takes the title.

These men converge every two days (Eke and Ahor) to entertain cases, mostly land-related and civil ones. They set a level ground for objective enabling of both parties to tender their sides of the matter in contention and after both parties have narrated, they give space for witnesses to testify. Verifications where necessary are also considered important. Here, ruling comes by questioning both parties to the case (cross examination) and it's almost like the guilty person will say so indirectly by the questions he or she answers. No one here has the power to administer a perverted justice as rulings here are irreversible. Even if an origbo wishes to pass judgment on a compromised premises, other elders can disagree until justice is served. Just as every other court, evidence and sensible logic as well as manners matter allot.

They also have their messengers who act as the police called *Ochu*

Ooku. There are allot of duties the Ochu Ooku execute such as notifying the defendant of their filed case(s) once the complainant has sued, accompanying a defaulter to remit the token he was fined for defaulting, applying force where necessary, putting an ongoing work at halt when the work or the land involved is at stake, etc.

One may say that this court can be compromised sometimes, but it is difficult because there is no judge, unlike the English man's court. Anyone (an Ichie or origbo) here can rule and the ruling can only subsist once the elders (Nde Ichie) admit it as just. This court acts as the Supreme Court in Akpoha as any case that comes here can no longer be further litigated or appealed within Akpoha. When a case is purely a family affair, this court does its best to refer such case back to the family level, but if parties insist, they sit over it. Noteworthy also is that case laws and reference cases are not necessary in this Akpoha Supreme Court.

2. Ekpu Uke Eto: They serve as both legislature and judiciary as they possess the power to make laws and also to sit over cases. They sit every four days (Ahor) to entertain cases. They practically entertain lighter cases than Nde Meri Ugwu. They settle cases among individuals at lesser costs and lesser processes. Cases seen beyond them can be appealed to Nde Essaa, an indication that they have lower jurisdiction than the Essaa.

In certain cases, when an individual thinks the Ekpu Uke Eto have wrongly treated his case, he has the right to sue the Eto. As for whether the Ekpu Uke Eto can give partial judgments, the possibility is on the high side as often times, some individuals who seem to be more powerful than others tend to dominate the Eto group, acting more like dictators other than leaders. This is why many people prefer taking their cases straight to Nde Meri Ugwu

instead of Eto. Although they are called 'Eto Ji Ali', matters concerned with internal land disputes among indigent Akpohans are not their kind of matters to treat because lands are very important properties and MUST be handled with utmost care, although they control confiscated lands seized from defaulting individuals. Such lands are mostly seized from individuals who fail to fulfil a particular condition emanating from a judged case.

3. Nde Essaa: Just like the Eto, they preside over ordinary matters and not land-related matters. This is the appellate court where matters believed to be mal-handled by the Ekpu Uke Eto are treated better. They have the right to question the judgment of the Eto and can also reverse same where or when the need be. One can also appeal his case from here, but empirically looking at certain factors, the appellant should know that having passed through both the Eto and the Essaa, his case might still fail at the Nde Meri Ugwu supreme court which is unfortunately (to the appellant) the overall apex court.

4. Nde Youth: It is important to explain that the youth council of Akpoha entertain judicial matters, but that's not their basic duty. They do this just to ascertain the level of truancy or falsehood surrounding a case brought before them. Just as this chapter has elucidated, the youths are wary of criminals and as such, they do not take criminal matters lightly.

While other courts or levels of the Akpoha judicial system undertake civil cases and seldom criminal cases, handling criminal cases is a specialty of the youths. Such cases as sexual abuse of minors, rape, theft, incessant violence/ aggression, cultism or cultic practices, arson, etc pass through the youths before they get to the other bodies if they must, otherwise they just end with the youths.

No matter how angrily inspired, the youth president does not pass

orders to punish an accused until he is totally found guilty with clear (*prima facie*) evidences that prove he/ she actually committed the said crime. This takes exception for when 'warming the person up' with some strokes of cane can bring out the truth and it is not a form of punishment. This happens where suspicion is on the high probability. Where investigation matters, the youths can secretly send out some individuals to investigate on the said matter and they can only make the allegation public once they can prove the accused guilty. Punishments depend on the gravity or magnitude of the offense.

Sometimes, the youth wing of a compound (Ezi) or village (Evo) can organize themselves to secure their area against criminals without or within them and when they catch one in the act, they do same thing the higher youth council would do, or take the accused to the higher youths. Ezi Orji (in Amata) for instance would take the person to the 'Ebete' and lie the person down, giving him some good number of strokes of cane as what his punishment demands, and where not necessary, other punishments may be applied.

5. Umu Di/ Umu Nna: Though other cases can be entertained depending on its kind or who are involved, the most sensitive kind of case for this level is the case of adultery. There is a law in Akpoha which prohibits a married woman from meeting with another man. She becomes very sacred the moment her bride price has been paid. Aside her husband, every other adult male is prohibited from touching her in a much romantic or intimate manner. When such happens, even if nobody sees her, the deities responsible for enforcing this law will automatically visit her with wrath.

Judicial actions are taken when the individual/(s) involved are trying to deny the allegation. One can be accused of an adulterous act judging by the

signs that are seen around him/her. To judge this kind of matter, the accused person is taken to the Ebete of his/ her kindred, a place considered to be the abode of the *Maa Ebete* and *Omarali* deities who are considered as responsible for chastity of the land. If an accused person dares to lie while in Ebete, the gods will prove him otherwise in many ways, some of which is putting the truth in the mouth of the liar (unknowingly), twisting the person's neck, etcetra.

Chapter 3

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is not our religion because our forefathers never knew about Christ, but the white men who brought Christianity to us met us worshiping the Most High God. The ancestors of Akpoha had their ways of drawing the attention of Chiukwu Okike Abiama to themselves whenever they needed his intervention. The Most High God known to Akpoha was Nna Chiukwu Ibini Ukpabi. But their ways of worshiping this God was without a Bible. They believed in:

- Sacrifice
- Offering/ Giving
- Doing to others what one wishes others to do to them
- Sanctity and Holiness, &
- Praises.

Uprightness was the yardstick with which virtue was measured. It doesn't matter what one believes, '*Ofor'* was the most active messenger ever had. This

means that whether one was right or wrong, he must be afore-judged by his conscience and whatever his conscience told him was the right thing to do. If you are hell-bent on intimidating the less-privileged, posterity was believed to be stronger than you and would definitely avenge the acts you do to others on you.

Every kindred had a deity they were loyal to, believing that the deities were the messengers of the Most High God, thereby worshiping the Most High God through those deities. What an Akpoha Traditional Religion faithful doesn't believe is that he should accept to worship Christ because he was born by a virgin, doubting seriously the possibility of a woman to conceive without meeting and mating with a man. There is need to understand that not believing in Christ does not mean that one does not worship God. For emphasis, every religion believes in the existence of God. So far as one is loyal and faithful to a deity, he worships a god (***Dei*** is a Latin word for ***'God'***). 'Chi' or 'Chi uwa' is the Igbo name for God. (This story is not told from the point of view of a Christian but a historian. So it should not be misinterpreted as countering the belief of Christianity).

The difference here is the individual conceptions of god and the approaches used in the worship. So, our forefathers were worshiping the Most High God, but they were not Christians. We must set aside the argument of which religion is the best, because even a Philosophers' Degree (Ph.D) program in Philosophy and Religion or a lifetime education in a School of Theology cannot reconcile the arguments emanating from the subject, hence it has remained an unresolved controversy.

In those days, every kindred, compound or even a nuclear family had a god they served which they believed would in turn submit their requests or

supplications to the Most High God. We are going to highlight some of the deities worshiped in Akpoha before the emergence of Christianity, thus:

i. **Mmaku:** Was one of the deities in Akpoha and was represented by a very giant tree, located at Evo Amachi. Those loyal to it would consult it in times of wrestling and ask for its support to see that they come victorious. An elder told us that at the demise of Mmaku, it took allot of great men for the Mmaku to die off and a night before its fall, it was crying like a human round the villages, lamenting how unjustly it was being chased away. The tree was also said to be bleeding while it was being hewed down.

ii. **Akpam:** It is a god of justice and does not allow one to act unjustly against another. One of the problems of Akpam is that it had many laws guiding its use and operation. When a sacrifice is offered to it, it protects its loyalists from the sights of their enemies or people wanting to harm them.

iii. **Egbemgbe:** Was owned by the Ezi Ele compound and was against stealing. It could also cause someone to be stealing. From childhood, anyone born from that kindred had to be dedicated to it, otherwise it would possess the person with the stealing spirit. Even if a child from the kindred is taken to another kindred or village and the people want to claim ownership over the child, it would make the child start stealing so that the child would be willingly disclaimed.

Egbemgbe was also against promiscuity as it was fond of harvesting foetus from a promiscuous married woman, a sign that all was not well with the woman. When such happens consistently, the elders of the compound or kindred would consult a *Dibia* (a seer) to

know what was wrong with the woman.

iv. **Mgbalaeze:** This deity was responsible for music and wrestling and is owned by Nde Odeke Chi kindred. During any festival of music, it gave the loyalists melodious voices for singing, and they would also consult it whenever they were going for a wrestle match with other people so they could emerge victorious at the end.

v. **Obasi Aya:** It was the deity of war owned by Ugo Chite, the ancestor of Ezi Ugo and Ogbuu Eze, the ancestor of Ndabu Ogbuu Eze compound in Ezi Orji. These men were warlords and they made this deities to aid them in their warfare.

This was the history behind the addage *"akpokota Mkume la owaa erosi"* meaning that when stones are gathered, a deity is formed. The stones here are human heads. It was said that Ugo Chite and his friend Ogbuu Eze formed this god by gathering some human heads and offering libations to it. In its operation, it protects its faithful loyalists in the war front from enemies. In fact, an enemy would just walk past an Obasi Aya faithful without seeing him and the Obasi Aya faithful could just smite the enemy. It takes only human heads or alternatively dog heads for appeasement or consultation rituals.

vi. **Ekwe Ezi:** It protects the farms of its faithful loyalists from preators and pests. This deity is owned by Nde Ezi Odome. The reason they don't eat monkeys is because they believe monkeys are part of the gods worshipped as Ekwe Ezi.

vii. **Abarogwu:** Among those who use the Abarogwu, it is used to protect a farm or other items from thieves and is owned by Nde Ogeri Nnoyo. Its symptom is that the victim's belly will begin to protrude, resulting

to his/her consequent death.

viii. **Otu Egba:** A marine deity. Where there is a water blockage of road and the people want to pass through the water without a canoe, the people who know it can jump into the river and a big crocodile would carry them across the bank of the water/ river. These people believe they can never be drowned by water because they serve the god of waters.

ix. **Omaeze:** The deity of progress, success and breakthrough. Whenever an Omeze faithful experiences difficulties in life, the elders take him to the Omaeze deity and observe the necessary sacrifices/ rituals and immediately, the person would begin to see a sudden breakthrough. Even if anybody had sworn that the Omaeze faithful servant wouldn't succeed and he is hell-bent in ensuring the success doesn't come, Omaeze would strike the person with some ear diseases so he would be busy treating himself and let the other be. There is a year-long water that comes out from the ground in front of the deity, if anyone is ill, especially stomach ache or ear disease, he would be taken to drink of the water from there and he would be healed.

x. **Akarakara:** Was owned by Nde Ijeokwu and is responsible for healing ear blockage.

xi. **Omara Ali:** This is the god that prohibits adultery. Almost every kindred across Akpoha, Amata and Amogu have this deity in front of every compound major entrance. It regulates the chastity of married women and catches/ punishes adulterous ones. This deity is still hundred percent active as the effects of Christianity has not got to it. If a married woman goes out and gets defiled, as long as she must pass

through the compound entrance, the deity which acts like a sensor would detect the vacuums in the woman's chastity and begin to act on her with deadly signs. Some of the laws of the deity include the following:

a. A married woman must avoid being touched on the breast by another man.

b. A married woman must avoid being held on the waist by another man aside her husband.

c. If a woman's husband is dead and she wishes to have sexual affairs, she should better pack out of the late husband's compound and kindred.

d. If the woman was married from the same kindred as her late husband, she should better not pack back into her paternal home. When she packs out, she must avoid spending a night in that kindred she was formerly married to.

e. She must not cook and serve her husband any meal once she knows she has been defiled.

f. If she is sitting on the floor and stretches her leg, she should take care that an adult male does not cross her legs or even an under-aged male who has passed through the Evo traditional initiation.

g. She must avoid kisses and hugs from men, including relatives.

h. A man must not support his son in evicting his traditionally married wife, whether in good or bad condition.

i. A man must also personally not evict his daughter-in-law because his son is also his kinsman.

j. A kinsman must not admire the wife of his kinsman to the extent of luring her to bed, touching her waist or other sexually sensitive part of her body.

k. If a man sees a kinsman's wife packing out of her husband's house and helps her lift her load, he is already an accomplice to the taboo committed by the woman.

l. A woman who was married to a kindred but divorced or was divorced to another kindred is prohibited from being buried in the former kindred when she dies. For that to happen, an appeasement ritual must be observed.

m. If a woman gave birth to a male child in a kindred before divorcing to another, when her son grows up and wishes to bring her to his house (dead or alive), an appeasement ritual must be observed.

Note that there are other ways one can go against the ways of the gods which he might not know, hence the saying that *"ali akagi ka madu l' aka"* (which means that the ways of the gods are not the ways of man). When any of the above rules have been defied or contradicted and the involved person or persons have not done the needful, the signs will immediately begin to show up. The sign can come in any way but the result is always nothing short of death. Sometimes the woman dies or her male children.

If after committing the adultery she still cooks meals and serves her husband or still meets him, the husband who can be ignorant of the crime may die if the signs that will come are not immediately understood and followed

up.

Sometimes when a man's wife is packing out of his house and any man among his kindred who sees her does not exonerate himself by throwing out spit to signal abhorrence, the consequence of the adulterous woman's crime can be extended to him and he might die. No matter how beautiful a kinsman's wife could be, his kinsman must not be attracted to her, otherwise death penalty will be paid either by both man and woman or the man alone (that is if the woman raises alarm). Sometimes the gods will create strange occurrences in the life of a man like forcing fesses out of his anus when he has not got to a toilet, pushing him into a public toilet, making him fall at the compound entrance, etc. When these gods kill someone and no one knows that the hands of the gods are in the death, thereby proceeding to bury the person in that kindred or a land belonging to them, the sign that may occur is that a lizard will run into the dug grave. When it happens, the elders will suspend the burial of the person in that grave and find out why the lizard entered into the grave.

Kindreds have their general hall called ***Ebete*** immediately after the major entrance of the compound. There is another god called 'Maa Ebete'. When an adultery suspect is brought to the Ebete which is where every case of adultery and other sensitive matters of the kindred are treated, the Maa Ebete will come and examine the suspect. If he or she is actually guilty of the said crime, Maa Ebete will begin to twist his/ her neck or force him/ her to say the truth unknowingly. The Maa Ebete and Omarali are a couple gods and work in synergy to maintain marital sanctity and sanity.

Let us note that there were so many other individual gods our ancestors worshiped in their individual families and as private sources of

protection. Every morning, the family head or the compound eldest man would take a water in a bowel and wash his hands and face, pick a kolanut and cut four tiny pieces, then take a white gin in a native cup (always made with a bamboo cutout) and pour libations to the ancestors of his kindred/ lineage, a form of prayer. In the libation session, they would invoke the spirits of the dead ancestors (who did well while alive) and chase out those who were evil personified, inviting them for a feast on the kolanut and drink. Below is an excerpt from Origbo Agha Ele's morning libation session on Sunday July 21st, 2025 (Eke):

"Ali Akpoha Igurube Nnekwu,

Ali Ehugbo Omaka,

Ali Biafra nnade k' ayi o gbuforu,

Ali Amata Okpotokum,

Maanwu ole gbuforu Amachi Okwe,

Ali Nde Ugo Chite, ba- akporu l' Ezi Agha Udua
m zobari okpa,

Ali bukwaa nnani je akporu l' ibe ali jedoberi o.

Oke Nnade kayi Igurube Nnekwu Nnoyo,

Okpotokum,

Nna ochie Ugo Chite Ikenga,

Oku Chite,

Odeke Chi,

Ogbuu Eze

Ijeokwu Mba,

Enya Mgbo Eni,

Oru Ngwute

Agha Nnekwu

Unu bia ba ataa oji a.

Ihe bu maa mecheri emeche, unu gbatakwarii ayi oso eyem eka. Unu ahuo ka ali ruhuru. Onye maari ihe ojoji gbue ibie, ya jiri gbue onwue o. Nwanyi alubatari la ezi e, maogu la otusigi ime, ya muari ayi nwoke muari ayi nwanyi o. Onye seeri ekpa laga mba ya kpata okpogo jiri waa ba-ewuje ulo, meje ihe okpogo. Ihe obula nwa amuru l' ezi e tiyeri eka ya gaje aga o. Obu oju ite la okwu e arichata. Uzo mechiri emechi, asim unu mehee ye o. O la odiri nwoke mma diri nwanyi mma bu ihe m la akpo l' enwa taanwa bu Eke maka la nganga onyelani adigi akpa. Unu ahu oji taa..."

Then he throws out the pieces of the Kolanut in his hand, offering them to those spirits he has invoked.

What arouses doubt is that those days termed 'evil days' by later days Christians were way too far better than now because the youth mortality rate then was at the minimal compared to now. In fact, youth mortality was itself

considered a sacrilege. This was why young people who died were never buried at home but in the bush where no one lives *(mbazu)* or burial ground *(ootu eja).* To further validate the ancient tracks of our ancestors, historical accounts of the 1967-1970 civil war scenario in Akpoha convince us that some of the reasons Akpoha was not entirely effaced during the war was due to some deities domicile in rocks (caves) that protected those who ran into it. Some were allegedly made invisible to the enemy soldiers by certain deities they were committed to, like the *Obasi Aya*, to highlight but a few.

Advent of Christianity

One of the biggest 'mistakes' our forefathers ever regret was accepting Christianity as it did not only weaken the rest of the gods worshiped, but entirely decimated them. The paradigm shift from the ATR to Christianity brought a dead end to the demi-god practices across Akpoha with the advent of the Roman Catholic church at Amogu (now called the Saint John's Catholic Parish) which converted so many devoted loyalists of those gods into serious Christians, including those already dedicated to those gods. It brought about novelty on diurnal records as women could rise to challenge their husbands when they say "carry this pot let's go and sacrifice to our *Erosi*". They sprinkled anointed olive oil and holy water on their husbands' sacred places, rendering the demi-gods less powerful or entirely powerless. This was a difficult time for the indigenous deities who watched helplessly as they were being spit on the face, while their loyalists rapidly shifted their loyalty to a strange ‘messiah’.

These early Christians were so dedicated to the service of God such that whenever the church declared a sleepless (vigil) night or praying and fasting, they wouldn't hesitate to abide. One of the devout early Catholic

members in Akpoha was Late Mr. Ebichi of Ohanwegu who was committed to the heavenly race to the extent that the missionaries were making plans to go abroad with him, but he couldn't make it. Down to Amata was Late Ukpete Ogeri Alu of the Apostolic Church who was literally accused of singing the Uri traditional ballad round the village for simply singing praises to God. He was mostly mimicked, mocked or verbally attacked for his strange deviation from the ways of his fathers to the ways of a strange deity.

At a point in time, like a wild fire, Christianity with her brother, Formal Education, began to spread and deal a great blow of imperialism to the existing Akpoha cultures and traditions. At this point, various inter-religious crises began to ensue.

The fair-skinned missionaries were evicted through invoked and spiritually manipulated mosquitoes, and other metaphysical forces science could not decipher nor demystify, so they abandoned their houses and ran away. Those houses were immediately converted into secrecy stations, where the Evo and Ugwu secret activities take place till today. This shows that our ancestors were not actually weak, but they were accommodating, reason they welcomed the white men at first. However, it does not imply that Christianity at its maiden days in Akpoha was weak. Even after the eviction of the missionaries, indigenous Christians did not stop. They rose up more kindled than their principals and began to angrily devastate indigenous deities, laying their lives on the line and deliberately crossing the Rubicon.

Christians continued to push for war because they were not comfortable co-habiting with those gods which they saw as 'darkness' and stood on the biblical philosophy that "light and darkness have nothing in common". This scenario appears like a tenant sending his landlord packing.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Christianity kept overpowering these indigenous deities as Christians kept extinguishing the lights of these deities and many more people continued to believe that they had been living in darkness, leading to the fatal demise of most of these gods. Apart from few of these deities which belong to obstinate kindreds (who still keep and maintain them), it is almost that Akpoha land has been purged of those indigenous oracles.

We must note that flushing out these gods was never a bed of roses as so many great Christians had to pay with their dear lives, some losing their entire households, some rendered permanently impotent while others got missing up till this moment. Some of these deities were borrowed, some bought, some were given as gifts from a parent to their daughter being married to a distant land, some inherited, some looted as part of war booties, while some were just made right here in Akpoha.

At the eve of their existence here, some peacefully left when the next generation could no longer offer them the due annual, perennial, biennia, biannual, monthly, quarterly, weekly, or daily sacrifices. Some were sacked by the churches, some destroyed by their owners after they were converted to Christianity, some returned to where they were borrowed from, some sold out, some ran away by themselves to avoid being destroyed, etc. But we keep asking, "Why are things not getting any better after all?"

Well, today nobody admits being an ardent traditionalist even though it's not everyone that goes to church on Sundays or even has a church they are fellowshipping with. Undeniably, Christianity has dominated the religion atmosphere of Akpoha, even though it is not all who claim Christianity that are true Christians. Deep thinking creates the belief that most of the gods claimed to have been sacked gradually take back their altars, reclaiming their

spiritual territories, destroying the destinies of the offspring of their servants, having been abandoned by their servants/ owners. Today, there are almost a hundred buildings called churches in Akpoha with less than ten known shrines in Amata and Amogu put together, an indication of the virtual conquest of our traditional religion by the Christianity.

Chapter 4

COMMUNICATION IN AKPOHA

What is communication?

Communication as an aspect of culture is as old as human kind. Our greetings, our verbal and non-verbal languages, arts and paintings, drawings, and smith works combined are the communication we discuss here.

Communication is the **Art** and **Science** of sending and receiving a message from a source to a destination, a sender to a receiver, an encoder to a decoder and from one end to another. It is an art in the sense that effective communication demands creative skills to be successful, and a science for its calculative nature. Communication without calculation will always result to mis-communication or say, misinformation.

How Nde Akpoha communicate traditionally matters allot to us, because our aim of writing this book is to keep the identities of Nde Akpoha immortal no matter what the wave of civilization may bring in the future.

Nwelibe (2017) pointed out that African Traditional modes of communication do not have a specific pattern. It entails the traditional ways of sending or disseminating messages to the receiver (s) or audience. It also entails the way individuals complement each other and the sounds they use other than words in interacting with each other or exchanging pleasantries. Here comes our greeting pattern. We greet '**Nnaa'** in the morning, '**Jokwa**' in the day or evening, '**Mama**' in the night when one wants to leave (as in Goodnight), '**kaa**' to express empathy, sympathy, ordinary compliment or thanks, '**tokwa uhwu**' or ***'kwoba je'/ 'jisie ike'*** to ginger up or encourage someone while working. *"Nnaa"* is a corruption of the original question word *'Inahiari?'* which means 'hope you escaped?'.

Why do our people greet 'inahiari?' We live in a place that was almost war-torn and lived in fear, even though we were always victorious. Nde Oha-ogu (enemy fighters) would always invade Akpoha at night to kill our people, so when people began to wake up from sleep, everyone would be asking one another 'hope you escaped death?'. This question continued until it became our pattern of greeting each other. Victoriously, great warlords like Ogbuu Eze, his friend Ugo Chite, Enya Mgbo Eni, and the rest of others laid the fear of not living to see the morrow under-carpet.

As for "goodday everyone!", we greet *"oha unu kaa!"* to command the attention of the crowd and maintain ice-cold silence where/ when there is noise. Apart from an Origbo, no other person is entitled to greet the 'Oha unu kaa' four times. When greeting, an Origbo would greet

Oha unu kaa!

Unu kaa!!

Unu kaa!!!

Oha mmammanuo!!!

While the rest respond "Iyeah".

"Tokwa uhwu" means "take it softly" and is a greeting for someone doing a work.

We greet "Ndoo" to someone coming back from somewhere as in "you are welcome".

When these greetings are misused, there is a tendency for the person so greeted to misunderstand the person who greeted him/ her.

Types of communication in Akpoha

Mass Communication

In the traditional way of communicating to a mass audience, across Africa and Igboland, there was no technology that enhanced mass communication until the advent of the radio in Nigeria through the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC (Nwangene, 2021), But there was a traditional way of reaching a mass audience successfully. We must note that communication to a mass of people who are "geographically and demographically scattered simultaneously" is termed 'mass communication' (Onu, 2014:311), hence, this section tends to clarify that there was a medium of mass communication in the pre-British (-missionaries) Akpoha, which was (even up till the present) the town crier. One might argue that the number of people the Town crier is able to reach is not enough to be called "Mass Communication", but the argument ends with Osaghe (2009:18) in his clarification that *"for communication to be termed Mass Communication, (1)*

It must be capable of reaching a large audience of at least 100 persons, (2) It must get to them simultaneously (3), it must break demographic and psychographic confines".

With regards to the above, the town crier's voice is loud enough to reach at least four patrilineal compounds that make up a village and which has a number of people not less than hundred; he as well passes this message to them at the same time at the hilly part of the village square and not compound-by-compound; and the message has no discrimination as to who should hear his message and who should not hear it. Osaghe (2009) further notes that where these three conditions are met, "the masses have been communicated to".

Nde Akpoha must not undermine the relevance of the town crier in information dissemination. He walks round all the villages in Amata or Amogu, striking his metal gong and alerting the villagers to his presence (commanding ice-cold silence), then sending his message in the most precise and concise terms, within the shortest of time. The town crier is always one with an audible voice and who is always available for messengers. He disseminates both private (information sponsored by private individuals) and general information (sponsored by community leadership).

It is through this medium that the villagers are summoned when necessary and new laws are communicated to the masses. Crucial announcements are passed twice daily (early in the morning when most people are still at home and waking up from bed, and night, about eight O' clock when everyone has not gone to bed). The town crier ensures that his message/ messages are duly captured and that none of his words is/ are ambiguous.

There is need to incorporate Trado-modern communication systems into the town crier's duty as such will not only ease the job of the town crier but also enables for a more accurate assimilation of the message as well as enhance the timeliness of the message. This can be achieved by providing the town crier with a public address system. It would as well not be bad to adopt a technologically enhanced community medium within Akpoha (primarily a broadcast medium). There is also a group communication system, interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication in the Akpoha communication system.

Group Communication

The group communication is the medium of passing information to the various groups of people in Akpoha. After the town crier has announced, the involved audience category would converge at the village square or wherever the town crier stipulated and what takes place is a group communication.

Group communication in the words of Ajulunwa, (2017:2) is *"a communication which takes place between more than two persons, be it small or large group"*, communication which has to do with one person addressing a large audience while others are listeners. It is to Onwe (2019) a *"communication among three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal"*. Be it as it may, it must involve the presence of more than two persons.

The Akpoha communication system uses the group communication to achieve allot of its aims and goals. When the *Ekpu Uke Eto* converge at the *Ahia Ezi-Ahor* for their meetings, during *Nde Meri Ugwu* sitting sessions, in town hall meetings of different age grades, etc, group communications take place.

It is through this group communication that orators gain their recognitions and respects from the rest of the listeners as they show the many speaking skills imbedded in them from birth. There are actually legendary Akpoha orators who can utilize Akpoha language in the most mouth-watering manners while talking to the publics.

Oratory is a product of wisdom visible through meticulous and carefully selective use of words while addressing the public. Individuals like late Chief Nicholas Egwu Oyo (Onwa), Chief Philip Igwe-Ele (Enyi), Late Chief Nicholas Oyo (former Esaa Chairman), Elder Paul Okoh (Okwuru Oha), Origbo Michael Ahor Isu, etc, were/ are not just voices for the Akpoha people but naturally endowed with the verbal ability to convince, motivate, actuate, appeal, or convict with the appropriate logics. This has practically nothing to do with the level of formal education. We see these traits in them while addressing crucial public matters and grounded experiences are the bench marks.

Speaking to a group of divergent audience categories do not necessarily require one to employ proverbs, idioms, or adages as it has the tendency to be either miss-communicated or misunderstood (possible with the use of ambiguous words or wrong use of such literary languages). As a matter of facts, every child born of Akpoha parentage should be raised to the knowledge of group communication, lest the child is prone to miss-stepping or getting into (avoidable) troubles where not necessary.

There are two forms of group communication in the Akpoha communication contexts which are the small group communication and the large group communication. While we have discussed the large group communication above, it is important we throw some lights on the small

group communication.

The small group communication is what takes place in our moonlit night folktales with our grandmothers after night meals. It is one of our important cultures that are gradually flipping through our fingers with the wave of 'civilization'. In the small group communication which sometimes may not exceed ten children keenly listening to one old woman telling them jungle stories between the famous hunter and the wild or crafty animals, Mbekwu nwa-aluga was always the hero with all his cunning prowess. At the end of every of these (fictions) stories, the storyteller would inquire from us the lessons we learnt and we would tell one after the other, then he/ she would give us the central message of the story, advising us on same subject.

Small group communication also takes place in Ebete when an adultery suspect is being interrogated, and in fact, wherever the number of people present is countable and each individual can see another and be able to communicate to any.

Interpersonal Communication

Nnade Ekuma calls *Ne Ekuma* into his *Ulote* to advise her on the nitty-gritty of raising their children to always man-up to responsibilities and not fear them. He speaks while *Ne Ekuma* only listens, probably nodding her head and occasionally saying *"anuom nna*!". The content of their communication can be kept secret or further communicated to a third party, but during the communication process, it was between Ne Ekuma and Nnade Ekuma, hence no matter how many persons that later came to know about the discussion, it was an interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication can be in the form of dialogue or quarrel.

In interpersonal communication, two people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages (Chike, 2019), and the content of their communication is a message with shared values.

There is a technique deployable in communicating with one another which aids our communications' fruitfulness. The legendary novelist, Prof. Chinua Achebe elucidated that "parables are the oil with which words are eaten". In the Igbo translation, Okammuta (Professor) S. E. Onwu explained that *"ilu bu mmanu ndi Igbo ji eri okwu"*. As there are idioms, parables, proverbs, riddles and figurative statements in English Language, so are there in *okwu Akpoha.* We call ours *'ilulu uka'*. These are the words people who want to be conservative with words for special reasons use.

When an Akpoha man speaks in riddles in Akpoha language, he probably has some words reserved for himself or the 'word of an elder' *(uka ezenze)* to give out and we take it essentially serious. We celebrate such geniuses as Elder Paul Okoh who can deliver almost half of his speech in riddles and finally make the last sentence in the most concise, precise and unambiguous terms, sending a staccato message. Let's talk about some of the proverbs, riddles and figurative words used in our dialectal *Okwu Akpoha*, thus;

1. ***Akari anugu ji nde maa ugwor*** ..... A stubborn person is indebted/ liable to death. This is always used to address an obstinate child on the dangerous implication of his stubbornness.

2. ***Ikoro jukari isi kweeri ochu*** ..... There is a reason behind every insistence.

3. ***Kpaa jii, laa jii akajegi ihe ojeri*** ..... No one knows about your

trip when it is peaceful and safe

4. ***Ibe eka ruru mbe la okobe ekpa*** ..... One cuts his clothes according to his size

5. ***Tufuru Nkita ookpu hari ya la nde maa ogu*** ..... Throw out the bones for the dog and leave the contest for it and the spirits. Means 'do your part and leave the rest'.

6. ***Emeri ole alagi maa? (rhethoric)*** ..... Is there anything one can do and escape death? This is not always actually about death. Literally, it is always used in likely unavoidable difficult situations to express determination.

7. ***Nwanyi okwa jeri ka oha a, asi a bia-agwaa maa*** ..... Means that an already bad situation is being aggravated. Literally saying that a woman committed an adultery out of bankruptcy and she is yet requested to apease the gods with expensive items.

8. ***Ike adigi ngwere mua nwa, la osi la obu nyee die*** .....That people always blame others for their failures instead of themselves

9. ***Nwa nramu onu si la eyerie manu la osute osunkwu*** ..... That a nagging child always request for the impossible, a reason to start crying.

10. ***Ihe abo chi ya la nnia yi*** ..... A wasteful child should know that he must definitely lose all he has. In other words, you can't eat your cake and have it.

11. ***Ahiri bu ogwu eku*** ..... Stinginess is the key to making wealth

12. ***Odigi ihe enwuru oku la-eme ngwere ma-obugu enya lilili*** ..... Smokes can't harm a lizard, it only worries its eyes

13. ***Hiitaa abugu iike*** ..... Working while already weary is never an expression of hard work

14. ***Nwanyi la acho nwa gbaje oto na-ala ulote*** ..... A woman looking for the fruit of the womb always goes to bed without underwears. When you need something, you act like it is actually important to you.

15. ***Otirim egbara vuru oko a*** ..... What one wishes me, he shall get.

16. ***Onye la anogu mgbe eliri ozu hijie oovo l' opka*** ..... One cannot give account of what he doesn't know from the beginning.

17. ***Anyiginyo ngongo kpugbaari isi gbajie aguba, o debe la egbusi amagi efusi*** ..... Ungrateful people always think that it is already well with them forever.

18. ***Ekwa ooku tie aki la ihere emie mkpume*** ..... If an egg cracks a palm nut, it is a shame on the stone. When one leaves his responsibility and it is done by someone he is superior to, it is rather shameful.

19. ***Onye eka di lie nnia, la obugu okpara gburue*** ..... He that has money should pay family bills and not wait for the eldest son.

20. ***Oje ozi rije ozi*** ..... There is a reward for a good work, or a messenger has his rewards.

21. ***Akamkpo si ohuru onye pa manu gbalaje, la onye pa manu ahugu ahu ihe l' ori*** ..... Be careful with desperate people, there is nothing

they cannot do.

22. ***Obu eka meri ite, ite me kpokorogom*** ..... There is a reason behind every action

23. ***Oju enyium la ofuta otere or oju ite la okwue arichata*** ..... When one succeeds, everyone around him enjoys as well

24. ***Uka di uto bu utara nti*** ..... A good statement is the food of the ears. People enjoy paying their ears to interesting stories or addresses.

25. ***Eka nri kwoa eka ekpe, la eka ekpe akwoa eka nri*** ..... Iron sharpens iron. People reciprocate what you do for them.

26. ***Weri ewu ye udo yala weri udo ye ewu bu nnani*** ..... 'Take the goat and tie with the rope', and 'take the rope and tie the goat' are the same.

27. ***Oke soru ngwere maa mini, mini koa ngwere nka okosi oke*** ..... You don't do things because others do, they may succeed and you may not.

28. ***Nwa si la nie amagi arahu ura, ya la onwoe amaghi arahu*** ..... A child that says his mother will not sleep will not sleep either

29. ***Nkiri kpacha okwu, l' oha aburu ukwie*** ..... Even if no one is behind you, when your words are true, everyone is for you

30. ***Nwanta la edoye uka na-eti eka la' obu rizoru la-o-ibe ndua di*** ..... A child that hits his chest while talking forgets that it is where his life lies that he is hitting.

31. ***Odigi ihe eriri rigbue egu*** ..... Nothing can be eaten to curb hunger forever. Means that one should stop placing much values on things that

don't really matter

32. ***Agwor ayagi oomu ihe odu ogologo*** ..... A snake cannot give birth to something that is not long. People give birth to their young duplicates.

33. ***Enwu si la ewefu okuvu la oloe madu*** ..... The mosquito said that if not for the shoulder, it would swallow human beings.

34. ***Nwa akwa l' azu amagi la uzo di enya*** ..... He who is being carried on the back doesn't know how far the journey is. You don't know the weight of your problems when they are still being solved by someone else.

35. ***Ozu onye ozo dije ka evu ukwu nku*** ..... Another person's corpse will always appear like a log of wood. You can't tell where the shoe itches if you are not the one wearing it.

36. ***Ehie ka je mma la ikwu ozo*** ..... A stupid person is fun when he is not your relative. It is used when one seems to be mocking another over something painful that happened to him.

37. ***Nsi ka ire la nwa nwa*** ..... Traits are more active in the offspring. This statement is often used when someone is perceived to be behaving or acting more like his/ her grand-parent/ ancestor.

38. ***Ekie utu, la ukpa ekie ogu*** ..... A poor man will always fight over levies (because he doesn't have it to pay and thinks that others who are paying are making jest of him)

39. ***Ihe agba l' eka ejigi enyo na elie*** ..... You don't need a mirror to see what is right on your wrist

40. ***Agwor onye lani huru bu eke*** ..... A single witness seems compromised.

41. ***Ahum agwor bu uya, otam eru bu eziokwu*** ..... I never believed but now I've seen.

42. ***Onya la enyo gu enyo dije ka oji anu*** ..... Doubt must continue to prevail until there is verification

43. ***Nkita riri utara taa ookpu, o-gini jie?*** ..... A dog that has eaten all it wants, what more is it waiting for? (An adage directed to someone who is still waiting after an assumed clear settlement).

44. ***Nwata o-gini gburu negi? (Erue), o-gini gburu nna gi? (Erue), o-gini iji l' eka?*** ..... What killed your mother? (Mushroom), what killed your father? (Mushroom), what is in your hand? (Mushroom). It is a rhetorical question used to explain to a child that he is about to make a repeated mistake.

45. ***Nwata akagi aka hua ofu, la enya alaa ya l' okpogoro*** ..... A child who does what he is not due to will always have himself to blame.

46. ***Kama uji ja erim, la enyium rie m*** ..... Instead of a pond to drown me, let me rather be drowned by the river. The statement comes in several situations, maybe in a situation where one doesn't want to take the judgment of his kinsmen with another kinsman (for fear of injustice) but rather wants the general judicial body (Nde meri ugwu or Nde Eto) to preside over their case).

47. ***Ewu taa igu la odavuru l' ali*** ..... A goat will only eat the palm frond because it is left on the floor. As in saying "you are only doing

this because no one cares to caution you against it.

48. ***Apata ku nwa onye ozo la orahu ura*** ..... The laps that are carrying another person's child are only doing it because the child is asleep. Used to tell someone that he is only enjoying a particular privilege because the right person for the privilege is not present.

49. ***Ihe choru esaa choru esaa*** ..... What must be must be.

50. ***Onye nnia no ndu rije utara l' ihu erosi*** ..... He whose father is alive eats in front of the oracles. (Simply means that the influence of a father protects his child)

51. ***Nraye gbuje ochu nka ogwaa*** ..... Incitement is more dangerous than committing a crime.

52. ***Ubi buje nwere nwere la agbaa ya ukwu okwuru*** ..... Relationship does not eliminate boundaries.

53. ***Onye oke amamihe rahuje la mgburo onye inyere .....*** The man who claims to be too wise ends up as a servant to the fool.

54. ***Anu la erigi ibie ahiagi manu*** ..... There is gain in inter-dependence

55. ***Nkiri akugu gbachie*** ..... There is nothing much a man who is alone can solely achieve.

56. ***Iwe l' ewe onye mkpumkpu, o-echi la oruatayeko*** ..... Being aggressive over one's misfortune does not change the situation.

57. ***Ayajegi nnunu oosi maya l' ali*** ..... It is inappropriate to do things the reversed way.

58. ***Ezenze anojegi l' ulo la ewu amua nwa l' egbu*** ..... An elder should not be at home and goat will deliver a baby while tied.

59. ***Elelie nwa ite, la ogbonyue oku*** ..... What is underrated would always do great things.

60. ***Okuku kpaa wa la oburu eku*** ..... It is the cock that wen out and came back that is the owner's. Safe journey is what everyone always prays.

61. ***Oosi nwoke tiri ibie bu nhi giderim*** ..... Whatever a man gives to another is a debt

62. ***Mkpota ihu ka oogbu ewu*** ..... It's good to always meet and iron things out.

63. ***Uka ka mma la ihu l' ihu*** ..... It's better to talk with one face- to face than hear-say.

64. ***Onye mari onyelani ikpe, ali jie*** ..... It is sacrilegeous to adjudge one man as guilty in a case involving two or more

65. ***Ihu enyi nyuhuje mma nko*** ..... The face of an elephant makes a knife blunt.

66. ***Ezenze bu ovontu*** ..... An elder is a dustbin (Means that an elder is the one in a position to condone/ and tolerate)

67. ***Mmaari ebugu uzo la okperi azu*** ..... 'Had I known always comes at last'

68. ***Ojeri ma owa hoo wari l' abali*** ..... (Often used for mockery) He that followed a shortcut but rather arrived late.

69. ***Abali amagi onye ocha*** ..... The night does not know the white-skinned. Means that one should always stay calm one place in the night.

70. ***Okerekwu riari ibie aki*** ..... We are in same condition. (This can be used to refer to two people in bad situations)

71. ***Ihe ezenze no odu hu, nwanta nyikoru elu orji nka o-mohua*** ..... What an elder sees while sitting, even if a child climbs the tallest tree, he can never see it.

72. ***Asi la nwa onye di mma la onuochi ana-erue uga*** ..... There is pride in having a good child

73. ***Ali adigi mma bu uru nde nze*** ..... There are people who will always benefit from the ills of the society

74. ***Aku agbari ahwa esaa, ejie ja-eme gini*** ..... What is the reason behind this procrastination?

75. ***Okpatari nku eehu debie l' isi ulo e*** ..... He that fetches an ant-infested firewood should prepare for a feast for lizards.

76. ***Ukwara ka mma l' onu onye gburuani*** ..... It is better to hear from the horse's mouth

77. ***Omeri gwow meri ma aju a*** ..... He that raises an alarm is ready to give accounts.

78. ***Agu abugu nwata l' anu ogburu*** ..... One can't be an intruder in his own affairs.

79. ***Asi nwata la ogbue onwo e la osi ka ndaa mii*** ..... When you tell a

child that he has murdered himself he will ask if blood is gushing from his throat. In otherwords, people don't believe that something has happened to them until they feel the aftermath.

80. ***Okuku nwata bu ehi e*** ..... The fowl/ cock of a child is to him a cow. Means that one should always be contented with what he or she has.

Non-verbal communication

When we talk about non-verbal communication, we talk about the various means by which we understand each other without having to say a word. In the Akpoha communication system, there are of course the non-verbal ways by which communication is carried out. Non-verbal communication is a reality in the existence of all humankind across the globe. Nature also communicates to man non-verbally. Therefore in this context, non-verbal communication could be natural signs, seasons of the year, shadows and their time implications, animal communication, instrumental sounds, artifacts, etc.

Let us now consider the many means of non-verbal communication obtainable within the communication culture and geography of Akpoha.

Ire Nkwu: The youngest palm frond when placed at a place of work indicates that work should immediately stop till further notice. When tied to a tree shows that no one should pluck the fruits of the tree. Depending on where and how it was attached, the message of the injunction is understood as a prohibition to some sorts of actions.

Formally, Irenkwu can be the leaf of *Nkpokorodu* or the fresh (or tender) palm fronds. But in an exigent case where none of these is available, it is allowed to use any fresh leave. Unfortunately, even when the fresh leaf is

dried and falls off, but the case that culminated in its presence subsists, the effects of the injunction remains undiminished. No one would care to explain the presence of this injunction where it appears, but the person who introduced it there can explain his reason(s).

Bamboo when put across the road tells that no one should pass through the road. It is the voiceless pattern of communication that is used to put people away when there is dry-season culture barring women from going close to a particular section of the community, or barring motorists from passing through the village square, especially when judgments or important discussions are ongoing.

The sound of a big Ikoro during dry season tells that there is a significant traditional event about to take place or that is ongoing. This sound is immediately responded to with women scampering for their safety, believing that it is not safe for them to be met by the *'Maa'* (spirit) that is beating the *Ikoro ohoro evo*, or its foot soldiers. From afar, the noise of the maa (which can never be deciphered by anyone) only sends a message to people that something secret is going on in the already confined village square and that no one should dare to come closer. Certain other sounds like the *Ikpo* of *Lugulu*, *Ohia* of *Igwomini*, *Ukporo ena*, etc that can be heard from the sealed area also send strong messages that something dangerous is ongoing in the village square.

Signs/ Indications: There are allot of signs that indicate/ send certain messages without involving a verbal communication. They occur to indicate that something bad/ abominable has either happened or is about to happen. Such signs include but are not limited to:

i. A lizard falling into a dug grave

ii. Goat seen on top of a roof

iii. Goat eating fish or meat

iv. An adult falling into toilet

v. An adult falling at the major entrance of any compound

vi. An adult eating sand at the point of death

vii. Serious outcry of a dog at night

viii. A body of wall or tree falling on somebody

ix. Sudden mass death of young people in a particular compound

x. Etc.

In the Akpoha language, such signs as the above are termed '*Ahuma'* and always demand that the elders of the compound *(Ezi)* or kindred *(Umudi)* visit a spiritual seer who can demystify the mystical message(s) and probably suggest a solution to the omen, or an appeasement to the gods.

Shadows are all over Africa a means of checking time as those who can read it can understand the times of the day through the position of the shadows. Alternatively, there are sounds of birds that can be used to read the times of the day perfectly.

Akpoha Satirical Ballads

Mimickery is our cultural instrument for positive change. We mimic and ironically bring to light the ills of the society perpetrated by some elements in the society through certain kinds of music.

Egwu Ahwua: The women use the egwu ahwua to ironically tell the men their lapses in social sanity by pointing out the crimes committed by their fellow man without name calling, and the men do same to the women folk. For instance, in 2022, the women mocked the men for their notoriety in theft without serious punishments for defaulters, while the men mocked the women in return for indulging in child trafficking, an act suspected to have been perpetrated by one of the women.

Those whose acts were publicly cajoled in the disguise of Egwu Ahwua sometimes in turn committed suicide out of shame, even though they were never named. This was one of the ways of maintaining sanity/ decorum in the society. This practice was always either a pre-planned or impromptu song composed by those who were naturally gifted for it. It serves three purposes: Entertainment, Exposition, and Correction. Everyone has the right to participate in the Egwu Ahwua and it is not logical to take it personal as the song naturally fades away in a matter of weeks after the festive period.

Egwu Okumkpo: Okumkpo is a masquerade (which we shall discuss in the proceeding section) which also serves informative, appraisal, expository, entertainment, and correctional purposes. Egwu Okumkpo unlike the Egwu Ahwua has no restrictions against name calling, reason it goes with masked faces. Egwu Okumkpo is an annual practice which is only carried out by men when they think there is need to point out certain things.

As opposed to Egwu Ahwua which centers only on the anomalies in the society, Egwu Okumpko can be used to appraise the bravery of a hero, emphasize the legendary of a significant personality in the society, the failure or hubris of an overrated hero, unexpected magnitude of stupidity exhibited by a known individual or group, the lapses of a particular matrilineal family

(Ikwu), etc. There is no specification as for the kind of theme the Okumkpo ballad can be sung from.

The information for an Okumkpo song can be researched for a length of time without the person it concerns knowing about it. When an Okumkpo wants to mention a person's name, it calls the person precisely with the name of his matrilineal family (Ikwu). Even if anyone feels accused by the okumkpo, he has no opportunity to tell his own side of the story because he cannot personally reach the same audience level as the Okumkpo. However, it is believed that Okumkpo does not lie against anyone, hence whatever it says is true.

Chapter 5

WE AND OUR CULTURES

Culture is a body of a people's collective identities, ranging from the food they eat, the clothing patterns, their language, down to the various artifacts and entertainments they value. Culture is an embodiment of all we live for and all that we cannot do without. There are quite allot of aspects of Akpoha culture we shall be talking about in this study.

Concepts of Culture

I was passing by the street some time ago and heard an old man at his mid-nineties boasting that "culture is culture" and whatever that is outside the culture is "unethical". When I looked, he was actually talking about how a piece of land was shared as against the usual way of doing it, then I asked "What actually is the concept of the term 'Culture'?"

The world over, the discrepancy in the various concepts of Culture by

various authorities in anthropology and sociological studies has never been perfectly figured out. This is because of the virtually absolute absence of ambiguity in the term. No matter the perspective, no one can define culture without figuring out the fact that it is a people's way of life in the society.

In the church, in a country, in a community, in an occult society, a social club somewhere in a village, among a market union, an alumni association, farmers association, international organization, sports clubs, a shrine, an institution, or a business organization, there are ways of doing things and it would be considered right. There is always a *modus operandi* that guides a system a defiance of which is considered unethical, unlawful, or anti-cultural. It is not same as the laws and /or regulations governing a system. Whether written or not, a culture is always inborn in the people that it concerns. In fact, it is almost needless coding (or writing) a people's culture because it naturally lives in them.

A society is just a collection of people with like values such as language, business, occupation, religion, geography, ancestry, tribe, demography, psychography, etc. Call it whatever, the ways of doing things in a society is what culture is all about. Without a culture, other things might probably exist (haphazardly) but human existence is almost impossible. This is because communication which enables human beings to co-exist and interdepend on each other is itself a human culture. What then is not a culture? Entertainment? Formal education? Nothing is not covered by the umbrella of culture because every single thing has the people who do it as their way of life.

Akpoha Culture

Akpoha culture is simply a compendium of the definition of Akpoha people-

the kind of food they eat, the kind of occupation they engage in, how they inter-marry or their marriage procedures, their language, dress pattern, festivities, etc. There is a kind of food the people of Akpoha eat and is specially attributed to them- *Ohe sarara akpuruohe la ahu akpuruakpu*; There is a kind of music and entertainment that appeals to them and possibly originated from there- Their folklores, traditional ballads, dance steps, didactics, masquerades; There is a festivity only Akpoha people observe- Isi Ji, Aju, Umuoha, Oome evo, Oome ekwa, etc. Nde Akpoha are known for the kind of dressing called 'Anam'. In fact, there is no need to overemphasize the obvious because every small unit of human inhabitation, even the smallest group of humans have a collective identity and Akpoha people are not an exception.

It is important to put it straight that Akpoha culture is not anti-Christianity, even though one may want to claim that an aspect of a people's culture is anti-Christian. The values of Akpoha people is so far so good not in any way in contradiction to Christianity, reason it was easy to adopt Christianity in Akpoha as a general religion.

The following are what the people of Akpoha hold in high esteem as their own culture:

1. **Marriage:** Marriage is one common culture that is practiced across the globe. It started with man in the Garden of Eden when Jehovah created Adam and married Eve to him. Marriage is natural in the sense that everyone who lives has the expectation to be married and give birth to children (except those who nurse the dreams for priesthood in the Catholic Church or other reasons for celibacy). Marriage is a strong aspect of culture that has a pattern to its observation according to the

people it concerns. In fact, except for the fact that every community or nation practices the culture of marriage, the process or pattern to it globally vary. For instance, even though Akpoha and Ehugbo are a closely related people, their marriage processes and procedures must vary.

2. **Traditional Cultism:** When we talk about cultism as Akpoha culture/ tradition, it should not be misconceived as bad painting of the image of Nde Akpoha. Of course what is morally (or generally) considered as 'evil' can be a people's culture. This is the reason the white man saw some of our traditions as evil and moved to halt them by strategies of cultural imperialism under the guise of Christianity and civilization. The Evo (***Ogo*** in Ehugbo and other sister clans) and Ugwu cult groups are undeniably part of Akpoha traditional cultism system. It is cultural in our society that a certain category of people must be initiated into a cult group which serves to preserve secrecy when necessary. This makes them strong enough to face whatever manly responsibilities that meet them.

3. **Masquerade entertainment:** African cultures and traditions have been hardly separable from their masquerade entertainment patterns because there is hardly African entertainment that is without masks, and all these are aspects of our culture and tradition. Masquerades are means of entertainment in Akpoha, but they have seasons. It is not a regular activity because tradition prohibits them from happening in the rainy seasons or anytime other than the approved times. The start-off time for these cultural activities is anytime from December till the time approved by elders (but must be within the dry season). Entertainment is in Akpoha an integral part of our daily life. In fact, there are some

persons that cannot let this period slide pass them without coming home to be entertained.

4. **Wrestling Festivity**: From the earliest of times, wrestling has been our way of life. We know the wrestling period as *Umuoha* and it marks traditionally the beginning of the year. We use wrestle matches to playfully identify the people with more physical manpower over others. It is part of our cultural heritage to observe wrestling contests on annual intervals and a mega wrestling contest at Evo-Agba and Evo Ndukwe. This mega wrestle activity does not have to be taken more serious than it actually is because it only serves entertainment purposes.

5. **New Yam Festivity**: The season of new yam celebration marks the official declaration of new yams edible. It is traditionally prohibited to bring in new yams into the village until the new yam celebration period comes. It is largely celebrated across Amata and Amogu Akpoha and Nde Akpoha hold it at a very high esteem.

6. **Child Naming**: Naming is as old as humankind. Even God himself gave Adam and his wife, Eve the power to name the animals he created, knowing so well that whatever that exists has to exist with a nomenclatural identity. But there is something different between naming in Akpoha and naming in other places. Naming a child in Akpoha is organized and has a particular way it goes. Except for the deliberate and erroneous corruption of our culture, naming ceremonies are big ceremonies in Akpoha. This aspect of our culture will be elaborated broader in the subsequent sections.

7. **Child Birth Celebration**: Known simply as Omurunwa, child-birth

cerebration comes either immediately a child is born or few days later. It has no rituals attached to it and does not go contrary to the Christian doctrines. Child birth celebration is necessary in every compound, but not a compulsion.

8. **Male/ Female Child Circumcision**: Circumcision is a pan-Igbo tradition which our great-grand fathers inherited from their Hebrew ancestors. Genesis 17:10-14 points out the position of God on circumcision, thus: *"And God spoke to Abraham, saying: This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and thy seed after you- every male child among you shall be circumcised"*. Later government policies have however put a halt to female genital mutilation, a practice our fore-fathers adopted for some good reasons. During the circumcision process, there are certain norms that would always be observed which makes it cultural/ traditional.

9. **Funerals:** A dead human must be laid underground, but there are particular ways of doing so which varies according to traditions. Nde Akpoha have their way of burying their dead, just like every other society across the globe. In some places, certain rituals must be observed before people of some social statuses in the society can be buried. Same thing applies in Akpoha tradtion. We acknowledge the fact that a man has well spent his life and that the life well spent deserves some celebrations. Celebration apart, there are certain things that MUST be done for a person in Akpoha to be said to have been fully buried.

10. **Age-grade association**: It is traditional to be a member of an age grade. Age grade system is the grading of persons in the community

according to their various ages (years of birth). This grading goes with three to four years age interval and every adult member of the community belongs to a particular age grade.

11. **Ikpo Festivity:** Ikpo festivity is the period that marks the shift from youth to adulthood for a particular age grade. It signifies a handover of functionaries between by one age grade to another age grade. This festivity is significant because it marks a great shift into adulthood and brings about a heave of relief from a number of communal labors. Everyone partaking in the Igbo festival would want his/her children and well-wishers to express that they are happy with him/her through one gesture or another.

Chapter 6

AKPOHA CULTURAL HERITAGE II:

(Marriage in Akpoha)

A man begins to advance to a woman he wants to marry when his age mates are ripe for marriage. He begins to look out for a woman earlier, even though he does not have the intension for marriage, at least for companion (A funny company that has no much time to associate for maroality's sake). As a young boy, he and his peers who also have their own female friends will always help the maiden he likes to take care of some burdens like hewing fuel wood, going to till the soil for the maiden's parents and even as much as picking cherry (Udara) for the maiden. He can gift her cosmetics like bathing soaps, washing soaps, creams, etc. Bush meats are not an exception if he can hunt or fishes if he can fish.

At an appointed age, the maiden's age grade are quarantined and are not allowed to come outside, a measure to build their skin and make them attractive to their prospective suitors. At that time, the betroated boyfriend is not allowed to set eyes on his lover. He comes as usual, delivers whatever gift he came with, or even if none, he helps his to-be in-laws in whatever ways they want, then goes back. This quarantine period is said that the woman is in '***Ulo Ubu'*.** The quarantine period usually lasts for one month and within the one month period, her beauty completely comes out in a mouth-watering manner such that anyone who sees her must attest to her increased beauty.

The period of courtship would always officially last for three years. In the three years of the courtship, the man has responsibilities he must discharge like farmworks such as clearing bushes and cultivating the land (A reasonable size of farmland). There will be no omission in any of these three years whether deliberately or not.

Chapter 7

AKPOHA CULTURAL HERITAGE III:

(Inside Culture: Traditional Cultism, Masquerade Entertainment, Etc)

Traditional Cultism: Otherwise called *Oome Evo, Ipu Ogo, Egbele, Egbela* or *Ima Mmanwu*. First and foremost, let me go by the views of Stuart (2007) in which he posits that:

> *"A secret cult is a group of people who have an extreme religious belief and who stand against expositions to their activities and standards".*

Cultism in our own context is the practice of secrecy practicable within the Akpoha cultural settings and which is limited to a certain demography of Akpohans. This cult system should not be misconceived as 'evil' as they help in keeping the lives and sanctity of the Akpoha land. It is not wise to write or say anything that implies a direct or indirect exposition to the cult system, hence such act is as good as rising against the people of Akpoha. This section of this book does not in any way intend to expose the **secrets** held in high esteem among Nde Akpoha.

Ogo/ Evo/Egbele tradition (or whatever any people call it according to their dialectal variety of Igbo language) is a broad culture among Igbos and there is hardly a single aspect of it that is not secret. In some places like Ohafia, Edda, etc, lives may be lost in the Egbele process as a result of the level of dedication given to the practice by those who think it is their responsibility to safeguard the laws and traditions.

If there is any way one can define value without such practices like the Evo/ Egbele traditional practices in the southeast Nigeria and of course, Africa as a whole, then there are allot of questions to such definition. The Evo cultural practice codifies and defines the seasons of the year, the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication Nde Akpoha are known for, and the kind of food a man should eat and vice versa, and also serves the people an entertainment purpose. It is our value written in a single code.

Secrecy is only an instrument used to safeguard and secure the cultural practice from possible imperialists who can only strike the culture hard once they are able to demystify the mysteries behind the culture. It is not itself a culture because secrecy is everyone's daily practice. There is hardly a person who does not have a secret.

There are three hierarchical secret groups in Akpoha, namely:

Akagara: (The least of them all which is basically for the children). These children use this playfully to practice what their eyes can see and what their brains can assimilate from the practices of the older cult counterparts. Umu Akagara are the younger brothers to the Umuebo and stand strong against them (just like stubborn junior students in the primary and secondary schools). They have their own masquerades and their masquerades are sometimes beaten by superior masquerades, the masquerades of Umuebo and Omeri Evo. There is no process or initiation for the membership of an Akagara cult. The only characteristic for secrecy is that they don't allow women into where they are preparing their masquerades or other things they care to make secret.

Umuebo: This is the second level of cultism in Akpoha. This level of cult engagement is more serious than the Akagara because there are certain levels of initiation and commitment involved. The father of the little boy holds him by hand and hands him over to the existing members of the Ebo cult (probably the head of the group) He knows the requirements, which he will fulfil, and then they will take the child out. The rest of what happens where they will take the child are stories that have no place in this book. They have their own masquerades too, which they use to either entertain people or beat girls and people who have not gone through the initiation process. They reserve exception for married women. Young girls are their biggest enemies when it comes to chasing people around or beating them.

Omeri Evo: It is the third level. It is more like a taboo to refuse engagement into Evo secret cult when one is due for it by age. It is done according to age grades. Every year, the age grade whose time it is would all go out on the hot Eke market day at the reverberating sound of the big Ikoro Ohoro Evo. The

echo of the Ikoro would almost lift someone from his standing position and it gives the impression that it is actually being hit by the great spirits (the ancestors). The first Eke market day is much significant in Akpoha that everyone believes it is dangerous for women to see the spirits that come out on that very day. Akpoha traditional beliefs have it that any woman who comes out on that day and sees the spirits within the village square might not be able to conceive of a child for the rest of her life if certain rituals are not observed. For this, every sane female indigene of the community would always steer clear at the sound of the Ikoro.

Ugwu Traditional Title taking: Even though there are secret things behind the Ugwu title, the Ugwu title is exceptional from the rest of the categories of Akpoha traditional cult system. Ugwu title is taken by people who are up to fifty years and above and are economically well to do. It indicates completeness in a man and any man from Akpoha who has not taken this title is seen as incomplete and is not taken serious for most privileges he should enjoy. Beyond mere title, Nde meri ugwu are a judicial arm of the Akpoha governing system and their judgment is supreme.

There are two significant stages to the Ugwu title taking: *Ugwu* and *Oome*. Ugwu signifies completeness as a man while Oome signifies exceptional completeness and attests to the man's level of wealth. Oome is an exorbitant title. While those who took the ugwu title are called *Osuu,* those who reached the grand finale stage (Oome) are called *Omezue* (An Omezue is respected as one who is wealthy). There is no masquerade pertaining to the ugwu.

N/B: This study is purposely not being exhaustive in order not to expose what should not be exposed. Readers should note that it is not wise to bring

to light the various practices which Nde Akpoha hold in high secrecy.

Masquerade Entertainment in Akpoha

Masquerades across Africa are more for entertainment than they are for other purposes. Others appear to flog people, but even though they flog people, they still serve entertainment purposes to spectators. They have their various seasons and can be seen only in their seasons. This is quite obtainable in Akpoha. Some of the masquerades of Akpoha come out on yearly basis while others come out on special occasions like Oome, Ekwa, etc.

Let us highlight some of the masquerades in Akpoha, viz:

i. **Chago**: Beautiful and prepared with the dry leaves of plantain/ banana. It has its face covered and chases girls around. If it catches any girl, it beats the girl. Sometimes, those who prepared it will be going with it. It is being prepared by Umuebo, the junior traditional cult group.

ii. **Lugulu Umuebo**: It wears tattered mat creatively tied round it like a cloth and has its face covered with a wooden carved mask. It also chases girls and Umu Akagara around, looking for whom to beat. It has a metal gung with a long metal in it, made for noise-making purpose, to notify people of its presence, called *Ikpo*.

iii. **Okpaa Umuebo**: This masquerade is beautifully prepared with a matted mask made from the fresh leafs of a tender palm frond and decorated with baloons. It does not beat anyone but dances from one village square to another, entertaining its spectators with its dance steps while its followers sing and clap for it.

iv. **Lugulu Omeri Evo**: Just as the name implies, it belongs to the Omeri

Evo cult category. It initially targets at beating people (girls, Umuebo, Umu Akagara), but in the evening, it begins to sing for people who in turn gift it foods, monies, and other things. It also has the right to steal from people, but cannot enter into a house, except the house of an Origbo or Omezue.

v. **Ogbukei/ Ogbukeni**: It comes out on a special occasion, basically in a traditional burial of an Omezue or someone who reached some levels in the Ugwu title. It beats people as well and can beat even a married woman. Women can drag it to the ground if they can. It may enter into a house without amounting to a crime.

vi. **Ena**: It serves an entertainment purpose. Ena chases boys around in the village squares and flogs anyone it catches. They also chase it, dragging it to the floor if they succeed in laying hands on it. This masquerade is used to identify strong people. It has a type of it called *Adambe* which is the leader of other Enas. Adambe is believed to be stronger than others and the rarest to pull to the ground.

vii. **Okparaki**: Its special characteristic is playfulness. It showcases its beauty and of course, is always beautifully prepared. It walks round the community, showcasing it beauty and the ability to entice people fetches it benevolent gifts like food and money. It also has the tendency to flog someone (but only those who stand on its ways).

viii. **Uri**: The Uri is one of the masquerades in Akpoha that come out on a special occasion. There are two major occasions on which the Uri masquerade can come out: during an Oome title taking or the traditional funeral of an Omezue. The Uri entertains immensely its audience by dancing round the whole village squares, including the

market. It comes out only on Ahor market days. Prior to its official outing, there is a music rehearsal of the Uri which goes with a temporal seizure of the village squares, there the music is rehearsed and the tune determined. There are many kinds of Uri, namely: Ochi Igbidi, Oti mkpuru eeza, Okoko, Nde Mgbogodum, Nde Ukwe, Ikpetemazu Uri, Olasaa (Ovu aakpor), Etc.

ix. **Okumkpo**: We have thrown some lights at the Okumkpo masquerade while discussing Akpoha satirical ballads in chapter four of this book. Okumkpo is known for satire and the use of ballads to expose, appraise, inform, caution, entertain, and educate the spectating masses. Egwu Okumkpo does not just take place unless there is a special ceremony like the coronation ceremony of a new traditional ruler (Ezeogo), or on an Akpoha day celebration which usually takes place during the Christmas periods.

x. **Okpaa**: There are two basic kinds of Okpaa that come out in their different times: Okpaa Omeri Evo and the Okpaa Igwu Ji. The former comes out at the start of dry season traditional activities and engages the new entrants into the Evo cult in a wrestle match to test their weight (strength) before they finally go to the initiation ground. The father of the prospective Omeri Evo or the person himself would gift the Okpaa a yam tuber or yam sidling. Sometimes, one may not know that his time for the Evo engagement is ripe and can only be woken to it by the presence of the Okpaa. The latter however comes out during January/ February to announce that yams in the farms are matured for harvesting and anybody who cares to bring his yams home can start. It also walks from one village square to another until it has gone round the entire villages.

xi. **Isom**: It is only known for jumping from a roof to another roof at the major entrance of the compound where an Omezue's traditional burial ceremony is taking place.

xii. **Egbele egbele**: With a beautiful mask, Egbelegbele is one of the masquerades that come out on this special occasion of traditional funeral.

xiii. **Igwomini**: It is one of the masquerades that come out during a traditional burial.

xiv. Others include: Abba, Egumgbe, Ota Mgbimgbi, Agbogho Lugulu, etc.

Other Aspects of Akpoha Culture

The following are other aspects of the culture of Nde Akpoha, thus:

- Child Birth Celebration/ Naming
- New Yam Celebration
- Wrestling Contest
- Ikpo Festivity
- Circumcision
- Funerals

***1.*CHILD BIRTH CELEBRATION/ NAMING:** Children are a gift from God and having them is really worthy of celebration. It is a painful experience all over the globe to live up to old age without having children, or at least, a child. In fact, marriage is almost needless without the considerations of having

children.

Do we still need further inquiries as to why child birth is being celebrated in Akpoha? It is abhorred to have a man or woman around who does not have an issue that will take after him/her when he/ she is no more. *Ahamefula* is a big name attached to the importance of having an heir. Sarah and her husband Abraham, for instance, lived in agony experiencing that their bones were getting weary and their skins wrinkled, yet no child to keep their names living. Even though the pains of child delivery is unimaginable, it is more painful not to be privileged to pass through the pains of birth.

Being much conscious that one was born through reproduction and needs to reproduce younger ones alike, he/ she begins in the youthful stages of his/ her life to think about a sexual partner for the union of marriage. The apex result of all of this is seeing that there is finally a child.

An entire kindred (Umunna or umudi) is always happy when they see that a kinsman has married a woman, reason being that one more person has increased the number of the members of the kindred, then there is the fullness of joy when the woman begins to bear children and increasing rapidly this number. This is why Nde Akpoha made it a tradition that a man whose wife gives birth to a child will celebrate it. It is not a compulsory fulfilment to being a member of a kindred, but the shame of not celebrating with Umunna is somewhat unbearable. In fact, it is only poverty that can paralyze a man to this extent of not expressing his happiness for a child birth.

Sometimes people celebrate their child birth even when the child did not survive the delivery, and their only source of happiness is that they have proven to the world that they are not impotent.

From the moment a child is born and the gender is announced, if the child is the first issue, people already know the name he/ she will bear. There is a process to naming a child in Akpoha, and there are laws guiding naming. The celebration would always overshadow the naming, making the naming a different ceremony that will take place after eight days.

Starting with the celebration, the man to whom the child is born will call his kinsmen and they will start drinking, cracking jokes and jubilating. Then come the women folk, sometimes singing from their different houses to the joy-filled home, exclaiming *"Ulomue! Ulomue!"*. The man welcomes them with some good tubers of yam (sometimes always five tubers), a big stick of well-arranged dried cat fishes, red oil, and other soup ingredients as the women would be requesting. They share the cooking shores among themselves, share among themselves some pieces of boiled yam and pound the remaining ones to fufu. They also share some of the fufu and soup among themselves, keeping a greater part of the food for the newly delivered mother as they believe that lactating mothers care for nothing else but food. While the cooking is ongoing and after the meals, they sing different kinds of songs aligning with the occasion, and sometimes they sing the songs to the different homes of the relatives of the woman who gave birth, to announce their happiness to them. Some of the songs sung by the women are:

1. Anuma ne omogo

ewu taa nri la anuma alaga...

(Continuously)

2. Wete mia bia ani ayi,

wete mia bia ani ayi

la ihe ane eri eri echugu uba...

3. Mnweri m eme o

Omnweri ma m meleje

Mnweri m eme o

Omnweri ma m meleje

Ma m riri ma m erigi m eweri nchanwu kpari l' evu,

kute nwa nwam, onye je-ama la erigim nri abali ma obugu egu?

Mnweri ma m meleje.

The fact that these women must always request for their *'Nri Okokoriko'* does not mean that they are hunger stricken, they only do it for traditions sake. In fact, it is compulsory among the women to eat of the Okokoriko food as rejection of same suggests that the person who rejected it is not happy with the newly born child.

As for child naming, the man calls together his kinsmen, age mates, friends and well-wishers and announces to them that he wants to name his child. He entertains them with drinks and if he can, may cook food that everyone will eat. Then he mentions the name of the child as they sing for him, asking him to name the child. Some can be naming the child after themselves playfully until he finally breaks silence, revealing the actual namesake of the child. The namesake of the newly born child will then

prepare a gift for his name sake.

Whether he agrees with the tradition or not, his first male child must be named after his father and his first female child must be named after his mother. This is the tradition of Akpoha, even though it is gradually fading away. Some of the native Akpoha names include but are not limited to the following:

1. ***Abaa***
2. ***Abam***
3. ***Ada***
4. ***Acha***
5. ***Achi***
6. ***Agba***
7. ***Agbii***
8. ***Agha***
9. ***Agidi***
10. ***Aja***
11. ***Ajuka***
12. ***Aka***
13. ***Akama***
14. ***Akani***

15. Akpu

16. Akuru

17. Ali

18. Alu

19. Aluma

20. Aluu

21. Amah

22. Amadi

23. Anigor

24. Anwara

25. Awo

26. Chite

27. Chukwu

28. Chima

29. Ebi

30. Ebini

31. Ebere

32. Echem

33. Eehia

34. Eekwor

35. Eetu

36. Ego

37. Egwu

38. Ejim

39. Ejitu

40. Ejuru

41. Eke

42. Ekuma

43. Ekwogo

44. Ele

45. Elechi

46. Eleje

47. Elem

48. Evo

49. Ewa

50. Ezi

51. Ibe

52. Igidi

53. Igu

54. Igwe

55. Ije

56. Ike

57. Ikpa

58. Ikpo

59. Ikpor

60. Imo

61. Inya

62. Ipia

63. Iroh

64. Isu

65. Ite

66. Mba

67. Nkama

68. Obasi

69. Obia

70. Obila

71. Odeke

72. Odimma

73. Ogba

74. Ogbonna

75. Ogbonne

76. Ogeri

77. Oguu

78. Ogwor

79. Ohia

80. Okah

81. Okoh

82. Okoro

83. Okorie

84. Okpo

85. Omaa

86. Onu

87. Orji

88. Oru

89. Orum

90. Osi

91. Otuu

92. Ootu

93. Oyo

94. Ovute

95. Udu

96. Ohia

97. Mgbo

98. Ukpai

99. Ndu

100.Uro

101.Uwa

102.Uche

103.Ogwor

104.Njoku

105.Ugwu

106.Oru

107.Nwogo

108.Nwocha

109.Oome

110.Ude

111.Oti

112.Olua

113.Ugo

114.Uga

115.Ugbala

116.Ulu

117.Okorie

118.Okoh

119.Ota

120.Ejeri

121.Oduu

122.Onu

123.Ologwu

124.Uhio

125.Ume

126.Etee

127.Elum

128.Ogbuu

129.Otuu

130.Idei

131.Elechi

132.Inyime

133.Ogba

134.Nwaele

135.Eru

136.Udu

137.Ejim

138.Omaa

139.Ogbuagu

140.Ngele

141.Ogwu

142.Omaga

143.Mbazu

144.Etc

2. NEW YAM CELEBRATION

New yam celebration is a pan-Igbo culture. It is celebrated across all Igbo communities, including non-linguistic Igbos like the Efik, Ibibio, Anang, etc.

It is indeed a remarkable occasion that marks the official acceptance of the edibility of the new yams. Why it is important to celebrate new yams in Igbo land is because **Yam** is the chief of all foods in Igboland. For everything that requires food, yams are the first demands and the most generally acceptable across Alaigbo. In Akpoha for instance, *Nri Okokoriko, Nri Ebisi, Nri Ohoro, Ihebuewa, etc.* are all prepared with yams. There are no shortcuts to bypass these foods except with yams. Again, yams have the longest durability among all tuber crops when already harvested. Ihebuewa for instance, can only be prepared with the dry yams that have been preserved since the last harvest, not a newly harvested one.

Now you see why new yams are celebrated in Akpoha? It should be noted that the process of new yam festivity in Akpoha is purely not secret but ordinary celebration, a credit to the bumper harvest, courtesy of *Njoku Ji*.

The elders-in-council would look into the traditional calendar against late August and early September and fix a date for the New Yam festival, a date that must be disclosed at least two weeks earlier. Before the official yam festive day, there are few other yams that are celebrated by some special people (Ji erosi, ji opoto).

In readiness for the highly anticipated Eke market day, the preceding Ahor market day is set out for women to go to the market and buy food stuffs and other things they would likely use for the celebration, Nkwor market day would be for the new yams to be brought home. This would avert every excuse of going to the farm on the very festive day for the reason of going to harvest yams.

In anticipation of this day, every woman married within Akpoha must not forget to make a delicious Fufu *(Utara Iwa)*. She boils the fufu and

pounds it, makes the best soup she can afford, basically for her husband and brothers. Every man uses this day to know those who truly care for him among his sisters. These are the people he can divide farmlands among, including his wife (or wives). He also returns to those who brought food to him some yam tubers and probably some meat or fishes.

Kinsmen are seen in groups drinking and celebrating, friends grouped in like manners, homes making their best meals, etc. However it goes, this day epitomizes celebration in the highest magnitude. Even though there is a whole year to eat yams, there seems to be something special about eating a new yam in this day because it marks the beginning of a new productive year. It marks in fact, the completion of a cycle.

My father, for instance, would never fail to bring new yams home on this special day and would make sure every member of the household (except those outside the community) eats it, especially his grandchildren. The significance of the new yam is never overrated no matter how exaggerated it sounds. Even after this day, one wouldn't dare to roast a new yam until some certain rituals are carried out with the *Njoku* deity.

3. WRESTLING CONTEST:

Wrestling is a playful friendly match among Nde Akpoha that is used to prove superiority in man power over others or another. It is conducted among age mates in the presence of an audience who enthusiastically follow the match to the end, hailing the winner. Wrestling can take place in any level, and somehow, anywhere. In the commonest level, two age mates can decide to show to themselves who is stronger, and by this, a wrestle match can commence.

The target of these contestants is only to see the rival contestant on the floor and he has won. It does not entail hitting one anywhere or making it look like a fight.

As a culture of the Akpoha people, wrestle matches take place specifically in June (middle of the year) following an official declaration of an end to the planting season known as *Oobu Irenkwu*. It is in the eve of the significant *Ahor* market day that the rehearsal of the wrestling contests officially starts in different village squares. They rehearse (always starting with children) for five days and move finally for the match on the sixth day being an Eke day. The villages that were rehearsing separately would be combined to form only two groups of opposition wrestlers. That is after there has been separate matches among individual villages and others.

The Ikoro is the melody leader standing tall with other African musical instruments. These musical instruments when beaten have the tendency of pushing even someone that never wanted to wrestle to the stage because it resonates morale and builds up the spirits into action. The sound of Ikoro is another means of non-verbally communicating in Akpoha as it is used to put the wrestlers together and is also used to separate them when they have wrestled for quite long. Depending on the sound of the Ikoro, the wrestlers will know what they will do. Same is used to celebrate victory.

Once the contest gets fierce or wants to cause a kind of fight, an elderly man among the male spectators would come out and raise up some particles of sound, then throws it up to the air and everyone will go home. That is the end of the contest.

In an ikpo year, there is a wrestle contest that will always take place only among the ikpo celebrants called *Mgba Ikpo* which is also wrestled

between their Amata and Amogu counterparts.

4. IKPO FESTIVITY:

This is a festivity that marks the fiftieth anniversary of a particular age grade. At fifty, an Akpoha man graduates from youth hood to adulthood and hands over most errands to the younger ones. It calls for celebration of course, especially now that the trend of death is alarming in such a way that reaching the age of fifty seems hard. That notwithstanding, aging to the extent that one is exempted from general labors is a great fit. The Ikpo handover is remarkable in the entirety of the life of a known Akpoha man because he begins from thence to enjoy certain elderly privileges younger ones don't enjoy.

There is no absolute means of defining the exact age of a person in Akpoha as to know when exactly the person is fifty, but there is an age grading system. The age grading is a grouping of people of three to four years age differences (E.g. 1991-1993/1994) and the average age is picked as the age of the people of the same age grade.

It is not everyone who is celebrating the Ikpo handover that is exactly fifty years old, but by implication of the above calculation, they are all fifty. In some cases, you may see people who are barely seven years older.

Those handing over the Ikpo will always undertake a communal project like building coverts, building a school block in the community school, etc. They also make some contributions for a uniform ahead of the D' day, etc. There is no limit to this celebration as it is in short, a birthday galore. Individuals have the right to order for drinks for as many people as they care to entertain. One can host a party to celebrate in his own way, just as anyone

who cares to brand polos and distribute among his friends and loved ones is free to do so.

Those who use religion to bypass certain general labors are not allowed to do so in times of Ikpo handover (celebration) especially when it concerns communal projects chosen by the people of his age grade, because it is believed that there is nothing evil or secret that happens in the Ikpo process and every human born in Akpoha has people that were born at the same time with him, and they are his age mates.

Now on the long awaited Ikpo days, the men of the graduating sect from the different villages will embark on a wrestle contest with each other. For wrestling purposes, Amata-Akpoha is always divided into two villages: Amata-elu and Amachi, respectively. It is a remarkable match that none of these two villages would afford to lose, and individual contestants would also make sure they have a significant defeat over their opponents as that remains the very last privilege they have to wrestle.

From the local *Evoagba* match, they move to wrestle with their counterparts at Amogu-Akpoha at Evo Ndukwe playground. They always go there fully prepared (spiritually and physically) with some kindreds going with their *chi*, individuals appearing with various scary (and mystical) beings and artifacts that define their religious identities and which they believe would help them achieve victory at the contest field. Amidst all of these preparations, the grand finale is still a friendly match. Elders present would never allow any of these wrestle matches to ensue a fight, instead they will abort it half-way.

The sisters and wives of the wrestling ones will always go to the field with them and wait at a corner as spectators, enthusiastically waiting to throw powder at them once they emerge victorious at the contest. Note that there is

no loser in this contest, even among those who didn't wrestle at all because the first victory is that God has preserved them above youth stage..

Back home, they embark on a village square to village square procession, singing and announcing to people that they have graduated from general labours. Everyone moves back to his compound and various homes to continue the celebration while those who are bouyant enough to take the Ugwu title will move to the right people who will take them through it. It is emphatically important to take the ugwu title at the time when other age mates are doing it as failure to do so belittles a man.

5. **CIRCUMCISION (UBU):**

Circumcision is one of the values we inherited from our Hebrew ancestors and hold at a very high esteem such that there is no way we can leave our younger ones uncircumcised. In fact, it is an abomination to an Akpoha woman to be married to an uncircumcised man from anywhere around the world.

There are both male and female circumcisions in Akpoha.

Male Circumcision: It takes about eight days after a male child is born to circumcise him. It is a process of shaping the cap of the pennis with a sharp object, removing what should not be to keep what should be.

The father of the new born male child would inform his friends and loved ones about his intension to circumcise his male child and would invite a professional doctor who knows how to do it. There is also a celebration involving eating and drinking. Sometimes, this would coincide with the naming of the child.

Female Circumcision: To do this, the father of the female child is not fully

involved. It is the mother of the child that takes care of it. By tradition, Ubu should be administered only on matured girls waiting to be married into their husbands' homes. While the prospective husband of the maiden is still waiting for the day he will finally marry his wife to his house, the mother of the maiden quarantines her and circumcises her. The quarantine situation is called *'Ulo Ubu'*. This we believe that without doing it the maiden may either have difficulties in conception or in child delivery.

The quarantine period lasts for four months (between September and December) within which the maiden is well taken care of and her husband-to-be is the only one that sees her. The mother-in-law cooks a particular traditional meal for the to-be son-in-law known as *Nri Ohoro* which is prepared with either goat meat or that of a sheep that the mother-in-law kills purposely for her to-be son-in-law. The goat or sheep is skinned and the skin of the animal is spread for the suitor for sitting each time he comes to visit.

During December periods, the circumcised wife alongside other age mates who embarked on the special treatment confinement together would be led to their various matrimonial homes. It is the women from the paternal compound of the maiden that will lead her to her husband's compound with properties bought for her by her parents. At the major entrance of the compound, they stop and advise the bride on how best to make a good wife to her husband as the groom brings out some yams *(Ji ebulu)* and presents to the women as their food.

Well, *Ubu* can be administered to maidens that are not up to the age of getting married when the parents think that their child may get married to a man outside Akpoha who may not consider circumcision on their child, just a preactive measure to avert possible difficulties in child birth or other

perceived dangers of not doing it.

6. **FUNERAL RITES:**

Burials have processes that are followed in Akpoha. There are certain things that MUST be done for a burial rite to be successful, otherwise the deceased is believed to not have been buried.

From the moment a funeral is announced, there are certain arrangements that are made ahead of the main burial. Depending on the social status of the deceased, the bereaved family plans the burial either conservatively or colossally.

To start with, the deceased matrilineal family must be notified that their deceased family member is being buried, first thing on the burial day. The information goes through an *Mmgba* procession by some group of youths, basically youths from the same compound as the deceased. They parade round Amata and Amogu with (or without) a portrait of the deceased, calling on the *Ikwu* of the deceased person.

Secondly, when they have returned from the Mmgba procession, they head to the mortuary where the corpse was deposited to bring it back (for the ones preserved at the morgue). The burial proper begins now. The Ikwu who were informed earlier of the burial of their family member are once again sought after *(achota ikwu)* with some items like fishes, etc.

When the Ikwu have come, the sound of *okpolali* (gun powder explosive) is heard, signifying that the time for the burial proper has come. No matter what anyone thinks he has done or is doing for the sake of the burial, what matters the most is what is done at this time, in fact, the person's presence matters the most now.

The first son of the deceased brings a life goat and hands it over to the Ikwu, then takes a seat. All the male children of the deceased person are seated as the burial will be ongoing. The husband of the deceased person (if it's a woman's burial) will be the first to bury his wife. In such a situation where the husband is no more (late), the siblings or relatives of the husband of the deceased would bury their wife on their late brother's behalf. The next would be the children of the deceased ranging from the eldest to the youngest. Where the deceased person did not survive with a child, there can be an improvisation with the male child of the deceased's sibling.

This burial process, for the male children are done by presenting a piece of cloth and some money. The money would be given in two places: one for the ikwu and another for Nde Ichie present at the funeral place. There is no specific amount of money demanded for this and no amount is too big or too small. Apart from the biological children of the deceased, relatives can also bury the deceased (for those that wish to).

For the female ones, it is a bucket *(Oku)* and a mat *(Ute)* that are used to bury the dead. While the male children would be burying their dead mother or father with the male relatives of the deceased, the female children would also be observing their own burial rites with the female relatives of the deceased.

All of these can only be done if the deceased ever had a child while alive. If the person died a youth, none of these is necessary. In fact some family members may even refuse to attend the funeral and those who manage to attend may not even eat nor drink anything there.

Sometimes there is a situation where the children of the deceased may still be tender and they may not be able to foot the burial bills. The deceased

will just be laid beneath the earth without any rites observed. When the children grow up and get the money to do the needful, they will do it exactly as if the deceased just died recently, no matter how long it has been.

It is believed that dead people come to ask for their entitlements. If a dead was not properly buried, he/ she will be coming from time to time to demand from the appropriate persons the things that were not done for them and until those things are done, they will not stop disturbing.

There is a traditional burial for those who reached some levels in the traditions of Akpoha, called *Ekwa*. It is the completion of the burial of an Omezue or people of high levels of some sort. The process it takes might not be exhaustive here, but significantly, masquerades are made to come out for the person's sake and to some extent, some parts of the community sometimes are not passible for some moments. At least while it lasts, the person so buried holds down the entire community for some days, signifying his prominence and significance in the community. He is undeniably a man of high importance.

If these things are not done, the family of the deceased may either be seeing him in the dream warning them to do for him what is due to him or they may be facing hardships in their different endeavors.